



Australian Government  
Department of Agriculture,  
Fisheries and Forestry

# The Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Daryl Quinlivan and Charlie Tulloch



© Commonwealth of Australia 2025

### Ownership of intellectual property rights

Unless otherwise noted, copyright (and any other intellectual property rights) in this publication is owned by the Commonwealth of Australia (referred to as the Commonwealth).

### Creative Commons licence

All material in this publication is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) except content supplied by third parties, logos and the Commonwealth Coat of Arms.



### Cataloguing data

This publication (and any material sourced from it) should be attributed as: Quinlivan, D & Tulloch, C 2025, *The Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review*, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra., September 2025 CC BY 4.0.

This publication is available at [www.agriculture.gov.au/agriculture-land/farm-food-drought/drought/future-drought-fund/research-adoption-program/adoption-innovation-hubs](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/agriculture-land/farm-food-drought/drought/future-drought-fund/research-adoption-program/adoption-innovation-hubs)

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
GPO Box 858 Canberra ACT 2601  
Telephone 1800 900 090  
Web [agriculture.gov.au](http://agriculture.gov.au)

### Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by Mr Daryl Quinlivan and Mr Charlie Tulloch (Authors), who conducted the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review. The views and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government or the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. The Commonwealth of Australia, its officers, employees, agents, advisers and the other parties involved in creating this report, including the independent reviewer, disclaim responsibility to any other party for all liability, including liability for negligence and for any loss, damage, injury, expense or cost incurred by any person as a result of accessing, using or relying on any of the information in this report to the maximum extent permitted by law.

### Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the continuous connection of First Nations Traditional Owners and Custodians to the lands, seas and waters of Australia. We recognise their care for and cultivation of Country. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and recognise their knowledge and contribution to the productivity, innovation and sustainability of Australia's agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries.

# Contents

<b>Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review .....</b>	<b>i</b>
Executive Summary .....	vi
Findings .....	ix
Recommendations .....	xv
<b>1 Review and recommendations.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Hub role and function.....	1
1.2 Collaboration with states and others .....	6
1.3 Legal and financial framework .....	7
1.4 Program governance .....	13
1.5 Geographical structure and coverage .....	15
1.6 FDF Alignment .....	17
<b>2 Introduction.....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1 About the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs .....	21
2.2 Productivity Commission findings .....	23
2.3 Summary of scope of work.....	23
2.4 Challenges in judging success of the hubs .....	25
2.5 Data collection methodology .....	25
<b>3 Context for hubs.....</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1 Drought in Australia .....	27
3.2 Past drought policy.....	28
3.3 The Future Drought Fund .....	29
3.4 Drought initiatives and responsibilities.....	33
<b>4 Overview of the hub program .....</b>	<b>36</b>
4.1 Development of the hub program .....	36
4.2 Hub grant opportunity guidelines .....	36
4.3 Grant agreements .....	38
4.4 Funding for hubs.....	39
4.5 Program governance .....	43
4.6 Departmental management and support .....	44
<b>5 Role of hubs.....</b>	<b>47</b>
5.1 Overview.....	47
5.2 Early implementation period.....	47
5.3 Role clarity .....	49
5.4 RDEA&C .....	51

5.5	Engagement.....	55
5.6	Projects.....	57
5.7	Communications and information sharing.....	61
5.8	Other FDF programs .....	61
5.9	Supporting funding applications .....	64
5.10	Capability building .....	65
5.11	In-drought support .....	66
5.12	First Nations .....	68
5.13	Working with producers across regions.....	70
6	Hub operations.....	72
6.1	Overview.....	72
6.2	Legal status of hubs.....	72
6.3	Hub delivery models.....	73
6.4	Hub subcontracts .....	75
6.5	Hub governance .....	77
6.6	Hub teams .....	81
6.7	Hub naming and branding.....	84
6.8	Hub funding allocations.....	86
6.9	In-kind and cash contributions.....	86
7	Hub reporting .....	88
7.1	Reporting requirements .....	88
7.2	Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) .....	89
7.3	Other hub reports.....	91
8	Hub program management .....	93
8.1	Hub Advisory Committee effectiveness .....	93
8.2	Departmental management and support .....	94
	References .....	97
	Glossary .....	100
	Appendix A: Review Terms of Reference .....	103
	Purpose .....	103
	Context .....	103
	Scope of the review .....	103
	Out of scope .....	104
	Process.....	104
	Deliverables .....	105
	Appendix B: Data collection and methodology .....	106

Lines of inquiry for evaluation .....	106
Engagement with hubs executive team and staff .....	109
Appendix C: Stakeholders.....	115
Appendix D: Have Your Say process .....	118
Appendix E: Hub entity summary .....	121
Appendix F: Cross-hub projects.....	122
Appendix G: Hubs Advisory Committee Terms of Reference.....	124
Appendix H: Hubs Directors Steering Committee Terms of Reference.....	126
Appendix I: Hub summaries.....	127

## Tables

Table 1 FDF programs and funding under the Drought Resilience Funding Plan (2020–2024) .....	30
Table 2 Key activity requirements under the signed grant agreements .....	38
Table 3 Total core hub funding provided to hub host organisations, 2020 to 2026.....	40
Table 4 Cross-hub project funding allocation .....	41
Table 5 Additional Commonwealth funding provided to hub host organisations, 2020 to 2026.....	42
Table 6 Comparison of hubs' websites.....	61
Table 7 Hubs' First Nations projects, resourcing and governance.....	69
Table 8 Hub governance structures and membership, at December 2024 .....	78
Table 9 Summary of hub staffing, at December 2024, as advised by hubs .....	82
Table 10 Co-contributions received at 30 June 2024.....	87
Table B1 Key questions and considerations.....	106

## Figures

Figure 1 Hub regions and host organisations.....	22
--	----

## Boxes

Box 1 Recommendation 7.4 of the Productivity Commission Inquiry Report on the FDF .....	23
Box 2 Tas Hub activities in King Island across the Drought Cycle .....	67
Box 3 SA Hub activities across the Drought Cycle .....	67

# Executive Summary

This review of the Future Drought Fund (FDF) Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs (hub program) assessed the performance of the hub program and each of the 8 drought hubs and provides advice on directions for the hub program in future. This review follows the findings and recommendations from the Productivity Commission's (PC) Review of Part 3 of the Future Drought Fund Act: Inquiry Report, tabled in September 2023.

It has not proven possible to undertake a conventional performance assessment of each of the 8 hubs, as there are no performance benchmarks across the program and evidence available has been variable in style, quality and reliability. Instead, the review has sought to compare the different approaches that hubs have taken, apply conventional governance principles, and highlight areas that appear to be working and those that are struggling to deliver the desired outcomes.

The FDF commenced in September 2019, providing a long-term approach to drought resilience and preparedness, via various areas of targeted activity. Within the FDF, the hub program started in 2021, aiming to support regionally based, collaborative research, development, extension, adoption and commercialisation (RDEA&C).

Hub regions were defined by the Australian Government, each covering a large agricultural and climatic zone. Eight organisations were selected via a competitive grant round to lead the establishment of hubs, enabled under a grant agreement with the Australian Government. Each hub operated via a consortia of partners, with 7 of 8 hub host organisations being universities. The other was a peak organisation for grower groups.

From the outset, the hubs were provided with significant flexibility to define their roles and functions, resulting in 8 quite different approaches within the hub program. Hubs generally found this empowering, but it had efficiency costs, affected the government's ability to oversee the program, and impacted on many stakeholders' clarity about hubs' purpose and functions.

While established under the FDF to support drought preparedness, hubs recognised that producers face a broader set of stresses related to climate variability and risk management generally. In some locations, the language of drought did not resonate, and as a result, some hubs did not use 'drought' in their name or branding.

The review identified that most hubs worked in a collaborative way with a diverse set of partner organisations, fostering supportive relationships to identify and deliver local priorities. However, some hubs have struggled to maintain cohesion and goodwill among their partners, and some sectors and organisations cited challenges in accessing the hub model.

The review identified a set of legal and human resources challenges within the hub model, stemming from hubs being hosted within other organisations and not having their own legal status. This means that hubs themselves are not contract holders with the Australian Government, cannot sign contracts with partners and suppliers, and do not employ staff. Most critically, the responsibility for each hub sits outside the hub itself with the hub host organisation, with most hubs only having limited governance structures which are advisory in nature.

The flexibility afforded under the hub program resulted in diverse approaches taken by each hub, leading to different operating models, governance structures, staffing composition and branding by each hub. It also contributed to some hubs spending time working to secure additional funding grants for the hub, the host organisation or its partners. Finally, it reduced the overall program transparency and accountability, with hub leaders often facing difficulties reliably accounting for and reporting on achievements of partners involved in the model.

While the hub program was intentionally designed to offer hubs flexibility to meet regional needs, there was a lack of guidance during critical phases of the roll out. There were also some tasks that could have been more strongly supported centrally, for the benefit of all hubs. Communities of practice established across the program to support various hub roles were viewed positively.

Departmental governance processes for the hub program also offered limited value in supporting hubs and were used more as accountability mechanisms. Similarly, hub level governance structures and processes were also highly variable in their composition and conduct.

The initial phase of the program was characterised by unusually rapid program development and grant application processes that required hubs to develop priorities, sign-up partners and estimate co-contributions within a compressed time period. Since this initial rollout, the program has been struggling to recover. The limited overall role clarity resulted in variability in almost all aspects of operations across the 8 hubs.

While the program has made some progress, it is not delivering the value that might be expected given the \$89 million in FDF funds allocated between 2020–21 to 2023–24. A further \$132 million has been committed for 8 years from 2024–25. As the program moves beyond its start-up years, there are sufficient lessons from across the program that can be applied to enhance its role and focus and improve outcomes from this large investment.

In the longer term, it would be ideal to reform the hub program to create independent legal entities delivering programs for the Australian Government in association with the very large Research and Development Corporation (RDC) knowledge system the Australian Government funds with industry, and with other Australian Government programs delivering business and community services to rural Australia. However, large-scale changes to the program model are likely to be disruptive, costly and bring their own risks and challenges. Further work will need to be undertaken by the department on alternative models for the program. The current model is not sufficiently stable or effective to be funded indefinitely.

The review has sought to provide recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing hub program. It is first necessary to define the role and functions of hubs more clearly, with the review recommending a central focus on extension and adoption. The purpose of that extension should be improved risk management generally but with a primary emphasis on drought and climate adaptation. Small scale applied research projects are consistent with that purpose and should be undertaken as cross-hub projects, wherever possible.

Additional Australian Government funding streams and services that hubs have delivered in the past should be limited where possible until hubs consistently demonstrate their ability to deliver on their core role.



The collaborative role of hubs must continue, but with greater coordination with key stakeholders, including state and territory governments and RDCs alongside whom hubs can provide integrated extension and adoption activities.

Hub grant agreements need revision, requiring hubs to have advisory boards with an independent chair and participation by the department and state and territory governments. This is necessary to improve co-ordination and transparency, and to provide more assurance about ‘additionality’ of the hub’s activities. These agreements should be less prescriptive about how hubs should be staffed and provide clearer advice on in-kind contributions.

Longer-term funding certainty should also be offered to hubs, but with suitable reporting and accountability mechanisms to allow the department to monitor and manage the performance of hubs.

The Hub Advisory Committee (HAC) should be dissolved. Functions that make sense to deliver once and centrally should be pursued at the program level, rather than in different ways by each hub.

The review recommends one hub per state and territory (except ACT), in recognition of the critical relationships that hubs need with state and territory governments. Given their large geographical spread, hubs need to be realistic about their coverage and offer services that are of greatest value. There is no realistic capacity for a physical presence across all regions, and the hubs should target their efforts through grower and community groups, rather than direct to producers.

The ability for hubs to play additional roles beyond their hub functions needs to be clarified, including their pursuit of FDF and other grant program funds (via their host organisation). The primary intention is for hubs to be sector-wide collaborators rather than grant fund competitors, to help maintain fairness and manage potential conflicts of interest.

Finally, hubs will be expected to improve their financial management capabilities, reflecting transparently their expenditure on staffing, administrative costs, projects and other line items.



## Findings

These findings are based on in-depth evaluation of various forms of data collected or reviewed as part of the project. This includes extensive interviews, hub engagement, public submissions, and review of program documentation. Each finding is further explained in the main body of the report.

### Hub roles

- 1) The hub program was launched as an early part of the FDF Hubs scaled up more rapidly than they could realistically manage in the absence of clarity on purpose and functions. They were expected in their first year to establish their hub models, recruit teams, formalise partnerships, co-design priorities, complete monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) plans, administer significant additional non-hub funding, and commence hub projects, while also negotiating COVID-19 restrictions in many locations.
- 2) There were no program guidelines in place from commencement, or since, to steer the work of the hubs, leading to vastly different approaches to all aspects of their strategy, operations and functions. Unresolved role clarity has had lasting effects on hubs and across the hub program.
- 3) Hubs were offered a broad remit and high degree of flexibility, so have chosen how and what they focus on under their grant agreements to support drought resilience across their regions. While hubs generally found this empowering, there were tensions for the hubs over time to understand whether the things they had prioritised were in line with expectations of the Australian Government.
- 4) The lack of clarity about roles led to inefficiencies across the hub program, requiring each hub to individually determine their strategic direction, what to prioritise, who to work with, what approach to take, how to monitor and report on delivery, and how to engage effectively across multiple sectors and stakeholders. A range of quite different approaches have emerged.
- 5) Hubs have been unable to effectively support all facets of their role, as outlined in their grant agreements. Hubs have been left to make pragmatic decisions about what they should prioritise and how they should operate, which was largely desirable and should now be endorsed.
- 6) Hubs recognise drought as one of several risks that may impact businesses and communities. Drought was therefore generally viewed by hubs as a subset of broader climate variability and risk, which hubs and their stakeholders widely supported as a more suitable orientation for the work of the hubs.
- 7) Some hubs were involved in research and development activities. In most cases, this involved relatively small-scale projects and applied research, rather than larger-scale research processes. This has not generally been considered a strong capacity for the hubs given their resourcing.
- 8) Hubs have focused on regional extension and adoption to build regional resilience to on-farm risks. This knowledge translation and information sharing role was seen by many, but not all, stakeholders as filling a gap in services and was generally welcomed as the most valid role for hubs to play. However, this varied by region, with each hub needing to define its activities and focus among existing services and supports.

- 9) Many stakeholders expressed concerns that universities were not best placed to lead extension and adoption services, so hubs have often worked through partners with on-ground networks to lead these services.
- 10) Upon receipt of additional funding and grants, the role of hubs expanded to include agricultural innovation activities. As this funding was time-limited, hubs' focus in this area has not been sustained at a meaningful scale, although the take up of new technology and knowledge through extension is an important source of innovation at the enterprise level.
- 11) Hubs have played a limited role in commercialisation activity, with most hubs suggesting that this work was not a high priority for farmers on the ground in the drought resilience context. This objective assumed that hubs would be more engaged in research and intellectual property generation than has occurred in practice.
- 12) The review panel found that hubs are generally working in a collaborative way with a broad range of partner organisations, generally fostering goodwill and supportive relationships to identify and support local priorities. Most hubs have been able to mature and strengthen their relationships with partners over time, however some hubs have not been able to maintain cohesion among their partners.
- 13) The tensions encountered by hubs working with partners have included: achieving regional cross-sectoral coverage; managing partners' contributions and performance; having the flexibility to adapt arrangements beyond those that were initially put in place; and offering opportunities for new partners to join the hub over time.
- 14) The formation of strong collaborative relationships with state and territory governments was crucial for hubs to define and manage their work programs. Some hubs were tightly embedded with their state and territory governments, others operated largely in parallel with limited connection.
- 15) A further role for hubs has been to invest in projects to advance knowledge or practice across their regions. These covered various topics and provided a way for hubs to work with their partners and producers on regional priorities.
- 16) Each hub has had to make judgements about how to allocate their budget between staffing and projects. Most hubs have sought to achieve a balance of both, but some hubs have heavily prioritised investment in their hub staff, with minimal funding applied to projects. This does not appear to be an optimal way for hubs to achieve impact or partner engagement.
- 17) Cross-hub projects were generally seen as successful and worthwhile, but were limited in their size, scope and duration, with only five projects completed. No program arrangements were put in place to continue these projects beyond expiry of the FDF cross-hub funding despite their apparent success.
- 18) Information sharing via hub websites varied in quantity and quality. Effective hub websites were easy to navigate, included updated information, shared project reports, had a repository of resources and grouped information into clear categories.
- 19) Hubs were not provided sufficient guidance through their grant agreements or subsequent communications about the role they should play in engaging with and helping others to navigate FDF program streams. This led to variable levels and means of involvement by hubs in

the FDF more broadly. Where coordination forums existed, these were most often led by state and territory governments, with hubs as contributors. Some hubs had very limited involvement in other FDF programs.

- 20) Many hubs are using staff time and resources to bid for additional funds from the FDF and other sources, including to support hubs, hub host organisations, hub partners or other organisations on their grant applications. This has given rise to a perception among some stakeholders that hubs and their partners have a competitive advantage in securing funds. It may also be eroding hubs' ability to build trusting and collaborative relationships across the sectors in which they work.
- 21) Hubs were successful in attracting sometimes significant additional funding from FDF and non-FDF sources. Additional funds secured early in the hub program shifted the focus of hubs at a time when they were in the process of establishing themselves, expanding their role and complicating reporting processes in relation to their core funding.
- 22) Most hubs directed a share of their funding towards supporting scholarships, internships, PhDs or postgraduate students, linked to agriculture-related studies and projects. These activities mostly arose due to the involvement of universities in the hub model. The effectiveness of these allocations is hard to measure, will take time to fully realise and largely depends on the contribution to research findings and the agriculture sector in the longer-term.
- 23) Southern Australia has faced drying conditions during the first phase of the hub program. The role of hubs in providing extension and support during these periods was well regarded. However, there is a need to be clearer across the program about the role and expectations of hubs in dry conditions, recognising the responsibilities of other parties under the National Drought Agreement. There is an understandable public expectation that the hubs provide drought services or are a shopfront to access services. Measures are needed to manage this misperception.
- 24) The hubs have made attempts to engage in First Nations priorities via projects, staff roles and governance representation, with limited success to date and challenges in doing so. The hubs are mostly focused on land managers practicing production agriculture which may not embrace First Nations communities in some parts of the country and have experienced high staff turnover which has affected relationship development. It is likely that the hubs primary contribution in this area will be as part of a broader FDF approach.
- 25) The expectation that hubs would be able to engage on the ground with producers via a place-based model has proven to be impossible at scale. Hub resources are insufficient to provide geographical coverage across large regions and sectors, even when working via partner organisations.

## Hub operations

- 26) While each hub is developing its own identity and branding, hubs are not legal entities. Their host organisations are signatories to the grant agreement with the Australian Government and any related hub subcontracts with partner organisations. Hub staff are employed by host organisations or partner organisations, and are not employed by the hub. This legal structure

does not necessarily cause conflict in the day-to-day management of the hub program but means that there is no contract between hubs themselves and the Australian Government.

- 27) Hubs were given significant flexibility to define all elements of their operations, including delivery models, governance structures, staffing composition and branding. This has resulted in 8 unique hub models across the country, with some similarities but many distinct differences.
- 28) Hubs range from highly devolved models that seek to enable partners to deliver on locally identified projects, through to models where the central hub holds strategic leadership and delivery responsibilities. Hubs are trending towards greater centralisation over time to better direct and coordinate their work and achieve efficiencies within their limited budgets.
- 29) The current model of hub program delivery via a large number of subcontracted partners presents a critical risk to the program, lacks transparency to the Australian Government as the principal funder, and increases the probity risks associated with the program. It adds an additional management burden on hub host organisations, which have often faced difficulty monitoring and managing the performance of subcontracted partners.
- 30) Governance arrangements for each hub are variable in their structure and composition. At best, these governance structures have created a platform to share ideas and make good decisions, with a range of parties involved. At worst, they have had narrow membership, discouraged collaboration or been used by partners to further their own organisational agendas. Governance arrangements at one hub have been suspended for a significant duration as a result of lack of trust between parties.
- 31) The department lacks representation on some of the hub's advisory boards, which has impaired the department's knowledge of the hub and line of sight into decision-making processes. The involvement of state and territory government representatives is also uneven, despite being a key relationship for most hubs. There is no prescribed process for inclusion of departmental or state and territory representatives, nor clarity on whether they should be full advisory board members or observers.
- 32) Hubs do not employ staff directly. As such, all the people who work for hubs are employees of other organisations, either the hub host organisation or hub partners. It is also not clear who, if anyone, is obliged to act in the best interests of the hub, particularly where staff are supported in-kind or where hub funding covers only part of a staff member's time within another organisation.
- 33) While difficult to precisely calculate, at December 2024, each hub funded between 10 and 30 full-time equivalent positions, excluding any additional in-kind time contributions. This was an area of concern for the review panel and indicated a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities between the hub and its partners.
- 34) Despite generally encouraging flexibility the department has prescribed employment of some roles, which has been counterproductive. For example, hubs established knowledge broker and adoption officer roles, but with some confusion about the difference between these positions.
- 35) Some hubs had faced significant challenges recruiting and retaining staff, due to their location and insecure tenure from short-term funding.

- 36) Hubs have defined their own names and brands, each with local relevance but little consistency across the model. As many hubs deliver activities via partner organisations, it has taken time for the hub program to generate brand recognition across regions. This has only happened to a limited extent so far.
- 37) Hub funding was distributed equally to each hub, regardless of their geographical area, sectors or related available services. The funds were limited relative to the scope of work and scale of operation anticipated, which left hubs to make choices about priorities they wished to pursue. There has been no reconciliation of those choices against the grant agreement commitments.
- 38) The hub program encouraged significant in-kind or cash contributions from hub host organisations and subcontracted partners. Hubs were generally successful in attracting in-kind support, but cash contributions have generally fallen far short of the amounts originally envisaged.
- 39) Despite structural challenges with the hub program, many of the arising practical operational difficulties have been overcome through the goodwill towards the program shown by the hubs, their partners and the department's staff.

## Hub reporting

- 40) Reports required by hubs were inconsistent in relation to their time periods, duplicative in their content and often difficult to prepare across networks of partners involved. As a result, reports were resource consuming for hubs to complete and of limited real use for program or grant management purposes.
- 41) Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) reporting processes were challenging for hubs for many reasons, relating primarily to: the timing of MEL activities; challenge reliably counting outputs; lack of baseline data; inability to define or reliably measure outcomes; issues collecting and compiling data from numerous delivery partners; and need to adapt to frequent changes in reporting templates. This resulted in high administrative effort by hubs, but low utility of MEL reports.
- 42) The hub program's monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) focus was on monitoring of activities and outputs. There has been little focus on evaluation of activity and no evidence that MEL reports were used to identify and guide hub or program performance improvements. There was also no effort to compile a national picture of progress or lessons across the hub program by the department.
- 43) Since hubs were established, there have not been performance benchmarks defined for hubs to pursue.
- 44) The 6-monthly Hub Directors Reports were most useful to the department in providing a summary of each hub's priorities and activities, along with any arising issues.
- 45) Financial reporting practices across hubs lacked transparency and reliability. Reporting from hubs on co-contributions have also been variable, without a consistent approach to calculating cash and in-kind contributions.

- 46) Hub progress reports were the mechanism to unlock milestone payments to hubs. These did not serve as effective compliance tools, with the department uncertain if funding could be withheld due to report contents.

## Hub program management

- 47) The Hub Advisory Committee (HAC) has had various iterations since its introduction in 2021 but has been largely ineffective in working with hubs to support their performance improvement. Instead, the HAC has been seen as more of an accountability function than its original expert advisory role, as have the joint Hub Advisory Committee/Future Drought Fund Consultative Committee meetings.
- 48) The department has faced resource constraints and high turnover throughout much of the establishment phase of the hub program, impacting on the level of guidance and support available to hubs.
- 49) Since 2024, the hubs management team has offered more targeted support to hubs, and increased its travel to hubs to build relationships, resulting in a greater appreciation for the context and work of each hub.
- 50) The 4 communities of practice (COP) and the Hub Director's Steering Committee have been effective in regularly connecting staff across hubs.
- 51) The legislated role of the Regional Investment Corporation Board in providing advice on FDF grants and arrangements does not appear to have added value to the hub program.

## Recommendations

This review provides 28 recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the FDF drought resilience adoption and innovation hub program. The hub program provides significant flexibility to meet to regional needs and priorities. This is an important objective and should be retained to the extent practical. However, this flexibility and diversity has come at a high efficiency cost and duplication risk and requires a better balance to improve the program's performance. The following recommendations aim to address these risks whilst maintaining flexibility and focusing on regional needs.

### Hub role and function

- 1) The role and function of the hubs should be clarified:
  - a) The hubs have increasingly focused on 'extension and adoption' as their core functions (rather than research, development, extension, adoption and commercialisation as the grant agreement requires). This should be formally endorsed as the primary function of the hubs, while retaining the capacity to conduct or participate in applied research activities.
  - b) Extension and adoption services offered by hubs should be undertaken in a coordinated way with existing service providers. Hub services should add value to existing services and not duplicate or displace existing service providers. This means some form of operating arrangements should be agreed with the critical existing providers, particularly state and territory government departments and the Australian Government's Research and Development Corporations.
  - c) Hubs should not provide 'in-drought' response services during a drought and their public identity should not indicate that they do. However, with the agreement of the Australian Government, hubs could assist with the drought response activities being led by state or territory governments.
  - d) In line with the FDF's aim of building drought resilience, including climate resilience, hubs should focus on improving the capacity of primary producers to manage risk and other generic skills essential for effective drought and climate resilience at the enterprise level.
  - e) Hubs should not generally be expected to prioritise projects focusing on transformational change, which is more of a role for research agencies like the CSIRO and the Research and Development Corporations with capacity to support higher risk projects, not small organisations operating at a local level.
- 2) Governments should not expand the role and functions of the hubs for some time to allow the hubs, and the program generally, to become established with a clear identity. If additional functions are considered relevant at a later date, consultation with the hubs and stakeholders should be undertaken before roles are expanded. Changes to individual hub roles should not be considered until the hub has consistently demonstrated it meets the obligations of a revised funding agreement.
- 3) All hubs should adopt a consistent name and branding protocol based on advice from the department. A revised grant agreement should require that hubs transition at an appropriate time to an identity, name and branding that does not indicate a drought response role.



## Collaboration with states and others

- 4) The hub program and individual hubs should improve collaboration, including prioritising the development of cross hub projects.
- 5) The hub program should ensure it adds value to existing extension and adoption offerings through co-ordination with the states, Research and Development Corporations and other relevant bodies. The department should have an agreement with the states and territories and relevant Australian Government organisations to support this co-ordination.
- 6) The government should integrate the hubs with the extension/adoption activities of the Research and Development Corporations to build on the extensive knowledge system the Australian Government has built in the Research and Development Corporations. We note that the then Australian Government minister made this commitment in 2022.
- 7) The department should work with the states and hubs to undertake a needs assessment to inform hub activities and planning in each jurisdiction. This assessment should consider these needs in the context of FDF programs and planning generally, as well as state and territory programs and policies. This is important because the hubs are not working in a vacant space and the key to their success will be effective co-ordination with the many others working on matters contributing to increased resilience to the risks producers and land managers face. More rigour is needed across the hub program to ensure it is adding to existing services.

## Legal and financial framework

- 8) The department should consider options for implementing a more conventional legal and governance framework for the hub program. This may include establishing the hubs as independent entities, locating the hubs with another Australian Government related entity or through an arrangement with State and Territory governments.
- 9) Revise the grant agreement establishing the hubs to require that:
  - a) hubs have an advisory board, with an agreed Terms of Reference between the Australian Government and the host organisation, with membership comprising
    - i) an independent chair with relevant expertise
    - ii) a representative from the department
    - iii) a representative of the grantee
    - iv) a representative from the relevant state or territory government
    - v) the Hub Director
    - vi) representatives from partners reflecting a range of interests, which does not comprise more than half of the board's membership.
  - b) hubs consult with the department regarding the appointment of key hub staff (including the Hub Director and independent chair of the advisory board).
- 10) Revise the grant agreement to be less prescriptive about how the hubs should be staffed. With the exception of key leadership roles (such as Hub Director), hubs should be able to determine their required skills and personnel.

- 11) Revise the grant agreement establishing the hubs to:
  - a) simplify and strengthen the reporting and accountability mechanisms, including tools for the department to manage hubs where requirements are not being met.
  - b) provide clearer guidance on in-kind contributions from host organisations and partners, including how they should be reported to the department.
- 12) The department to ensure the program has more active supervision, and the capacity to identify and manage hub performance and conduct concerns.
- 13) Revise the grant agreement to ensure that outputs of hub projects are publicly available and that hub websites provide comprehensive information on hub projects.
- 14) The department should revise the intellectual property clauses in the grant agreement to allow hubs to partner with research organisations on a more flexible basis.
- 15) The revised grant agreement should aim for longer-term funding certainty, subject to performance. Short term funding is incompatible with the overall objective of changing behaviour to improve risk management – that is inherently a long-term project requiring consistent and ongoing educational programs. Short term funding has also led to high levels of staff turnover in some hubs which is also inimical to success given the importance of relationships and networks to the hubs. This is especially the case for the hubs' engagement with First Nations organisations and communities.
- 16) The grant agreement should allow for and be accompanied by communications from the Minister or Secretary setting out their expectations of the hubs, grant recipient and Hub Directors, which is renewed on a regular basis and includes clarification as necessary on the grant agreement, cross-hub and national priorities. An interim statement of expectations should also be issued to existing hubs within the next 12 months, highlighting the primary role of hubs, early improvements in governance, decisions on the matters recommended in this report and key priorities for the remainder of the initial grant agreement.
- 17) The legislated role of the Regional Investment Corporation Board in providing advice on FDF grants should be removed in line with recommendations of previous reviews.

## Program governance

- 18) The Hub Advisory Committee (HAC) should be dissolved, with the department and Future Drought Fund Consultative Committee (FDFCC) providing advice on the hub program and individual hubs to the Minister directly.
- 19) The department should facilitate the delivery of some hub activities and systems (including communications and maintenance of a registry of projects and resources) once and centrally, rather than leaving individual hubs to make individual investments in these areas. This could be undertaken by the department or one hub on behalf of the program. Over time, it will be more efficient for various systems and services to be developed and provided centrally at the program level.
- 20) A program specific monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework should be developed for the hub program, including performance indicators and methodology. MEL reporting should have greater clarity around content and sequencing, to minimise duplication in hub reporting

- 21) Hub reporting obligations should be simplified, allowing streamlined and effective reporting. Reporting should focus on
- a) financial management and resource allocation
  - b) program activities (key milestones and deliverables)
  - c) outcomes, even if they are difficult to identify and describe.

## **Geographical structure and coverage**

- 22) There should generally be one hub per state and territory (excluding ACT). The relevant department should be a partner to the hub in their jurisdiction. This structure would recognise the most critical hub relationship is with the relevant department, its primacy as the historical extension services provider, and add to the capacity of the Australian, state and territory governments to collaborate on drought and climate resilience. The Government should discuss with the WA and NT Governments an arrangement for the NT and northern WA given that region's practical separation from the producer-based hub in southern WA.
- 23) The hubs should focus on projects with a realistic prospect of achieving an impact. Aiming for broad geographical and industrial coverage may be inconsistent with this, and the hubs should be supported in giving priority to impact. While hubs should continue to build networks with stakeholders across their regions, there should not be a requirement or expectation for physical presences or 'shopfronts'. The hubs primary vehicle for providing services will be through grower and community groups rather than directly to individual producers.
- 24) Hubs should plan how they intend to balance their expenditure on staffing and for project activities. These expenditures on staffing and projects should be transparent and accessible for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

## **FDF Alignment**

- 25) The department should implement a protocol that addresses concerns about conflicts of interest and competitive equity and ensures that hubs (for and through partners) are competing for grant funds on a basis that is understood by the public and other grant applicants. This may limit the hubs playing a more significant role in FDF program delivery, however desirable that might be on other grounds.
- 26) The department should clearly identify and describe how the program's purpose complements and interacts with other FDF programs. This could be achieved within program planning documentation and public facing descriptions of FDF programs. The program should not duplicate, or overlap with the purpose of other FDF programs, such as Farm Business Resilience, Regional Drought Resilience Planning and other programs aimed at improving resilience for producers and communities.
- 27) First Nations engagement should be conducted in a co-ordinated way with other FDF activities and programs, and existing Australian Government, state and territory programs. Guidance on reasonable expectations and regionally specific priorities should be developed by the hubs and the department (e.g. production agriculture, land management) as part of that larger process.
- 28) The department should develop guidance on the use, access and appropriate management of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property to support hubs and other FDF programs.

# Review and recommendations

In developing its recommendations, this review has operated on the assumption that the hub program will be continued in some form. As such, alternative uses for the funding allocated to the hub program was considered out of scope.

This review has found a range of challenges inherent to the current model and structure of the hubs – which relies on a grant agreement between the Australian Government and each hub host organisation. Challenges include extensive but often unachievable functions and roles for the hubs, limited transparency of spending and reporting on hub activities, and difficulties stemming from hubs not themselves being legal entities.

This report provides 28 recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the hub program, to be applied to the current model. These recommendations aim to define a clear role for hubs, while still providing hubs with flexibility to meet regional needs and priorities. These recommendations also suggest revisions to the grant agreement and program guidelines to manage program risks, and to improve transparency and accountability of hubs.

Improving the program will require significantly more engagement by the department. Most of the problems identified here and by the PC were inherent in, or resulted from, the original program design and have not been addressed since this time. Doing so would require more active program management, but it is expected that the current operating model will continue to limit the department's capacity to fully deliver on the program's potential and aspirations.

## 1.1 Hub role and function

### Role of hubs in RDEA&C

This review has noted that the grant agreements did not specify a role for the hubs, instead outlining an overarching objective, and enabling each hub to tailor their activities and priorities to locally defined needs. The ability for hubs to strategically select activities to meet local needs and priorities was seen by many stakeholders as a strength of the program.

The review agrees that local flexibility is important and should be maintained to some degree. However, with no program guidelines in place to promote consistency, the approach to almost all aspects of operations and roles are vastly different across the 8 hubs. This has caused confusion and created inefficiencies and duplication. Tensions have arisen over whether the activities prioritised by hubs were in line with the department's expectations and the grant agreement. There have also been practical concerns about the gap between each hub's notional aims of achieving 'transformational change' and the limited scale and capacity of the hubs to deliver this, especially for hubs that have allocated minimal funds for project delivery.

The original objective set out in the grant agreement was that hubs would undertake activities to enhance drought resilience through research, development, extension, adoption, innovation and commercialisation (RDEA&C). In practice, hubs have not had the capacity or skills to undertake this full range of functions and have generally not sought to do so. Whilst the program is expansive, individual hubs are small organisations with limited funding. To undertake all the objectives outlined

in the original grant agreement would require significantly more resources and professional capacity than is available to each individual hub. Hubs would also be an inefficient model for pursuing most of these objectives.

There has been a general convergence on extension and adoption of new knowledge, practices and technology as the central function of the hubs. This knowledge translation and information sharing role was seen by most hubs as filling a gap while connecting existing knowledge on relevant topics. This focus has been pragmatic and recognises that this is a potential service gap in most jurisdictions, where the hubs are most likely to add value.

However, the hub program was not initially designed to focus primarily on extension and adoption. This has resulted in a significant mismatch between elements of the program model and created an identity problem and difficulty settling on the skills required by the hubs. It has also highlighted the absence of structure in hubs' relationships with states and territory governments and RDCs, which was identified by the then Minister for Agriculture in 2022.

All hubs are involved in some form of research activity, usually involving small-scale projects or collaborations. There were few links between hub research activities and those of other Australian Government-funded research and development bodies, such as RDCs and CSIRO. Hubs have also played a limited role in commercialisation, finding this objective difficult to understand and implement. The commercialisation objective has not been considered a high priority for hubs or the department and seems largely incompatible with the collaborative focus and capacity of the hubs.

A focus on extension and adoption should be recognised as the primary function of the hubs and the program should be redesigned to deliver on these specific functions. It is clear that there are a variety of meanings used in discussions around hubs for research and development and this is an important part of the extension and adoption system (generating new knowledge, technologies and practices). While research and development cannot be a primary function of the hubs, linkages to research providers remain important and minor applied research activity will be warranted in some circumstances.

**Recommendation 1: The role and function of the hubs should be clarified**

a) The hubs have increasingly focused on 'extension and adoption' as their core functions (rather than research, development, extension, adoption and commercialisation as the grant agreement requires). This should be formally endorsed as the primary function of the hubs, while retaining the capacity to conduct or participate in applied research activities.

Extension and adoption functions have, historically, largely been delivered by state government departments and agencies, private service providers and research and development providers (principally the Australian Government-funded RDCs, but also the vocational and tertiary education systems). Over time, the traditional roles of the primary players have become less defined, with generally reduced government services, more private provision and online access for producers to information and services. This is reflected in the National Drought Agreement 2024–2029 which sees a stronger focus on collaboration and coordination between states and the Australian Government, and less distinction in roles.

To maximise the hub program's value, hubs should focus on adding to existing service offerings through co-ordination and collaboration rather than creating a new model that operates at the margins.

**Recommendation 1: The role and function of the hubs should be clarified**

b) Extension and adoption services offered by hubs should be undertaken in a coordinated way with existing service providers. Hub services should add value to existing services and not duplicate or displace existing service providers. This means some form of operating arrangements should be agreed with the critical existing providers, particularly state and territory government departments and the Australian Government's Research and Development Corporations.

## In-drought role

Hub grant agreements do not describe a specific role for hubs during drought or drying conditions. While most hubs largely understand that their role is focused on drought preparedness and resilience, the review found that there were varying views on whether this approach should or could be sustained during a drought. Some hubs also suggested that there may be public confusion around the role of hubs during drought, in part because of their branding. It is understandable that there would be a perception that a 'drought hub' provides drought services or a shopfront/referral service despite neither being hub functions.

Drought responses inevitably attract the available resources, and it is likely that hubs will be drawn into supporting communities and producers during a drought. This was evidenced by the 2024 experience of the Tas Hub. While the hub was generally well regarded for its role supporting the state government's drought response, hubs are not authorised, trained or resourced to provide in-drought support services.

Where possible, during drought the hubs should continue to deliver their ongoing extension and adoption role. Hubs could also assist in promoting access to mental health and wellbeing services, sources of agricultural and financial advice, and government programs including the Farm Household Allowance and the Rural Financial Counselling Service.

Consistent with the National Drought Agreement, during drought hubs should not coordinate drought responses (which is the responsibility of state and territory governments) or represent the views of the Australian Government.

**Recommendation 1: The role and function of the hubs should be clarified**

c) Hubs should not provide 'in-drought' response services during a drought and their public identity should not indicate that they do. However, with the agreement of the Australian Government, hubs could assist with the drought response activities being led by state or territory governments.

## Role in climate resilience

There seems to be unanimous agreement amongst hubs and their stakeholders that the concept of building climate resilience is a more appropriate and relevant objective than a focus on drought resilience alone.

The drought resilience focus is generally seen as too narrow. In some instances, the review heard that the focus on drought resilience has prevented hubs from engaging with service providers who have a broader resilience scope. Some hubs have also adopted the more generic objective of innovation and risk management, recognising that drought is a major risk facing community and businesses but there are others that must be managed. The review also observed that drought has a variable meaning across the nation.

This review considers that to build climate resilience, the most appropriate focus for the hubs would be to improve the capacity of primary producers to manage the range of risks relevant to their location and operating systems. Distilling the messages from consultation and experience to date, any future hub program should emphasise innovation, continuous improvement, risk management and business skills, with drought one of the risks producers face on an ongoing basis.

Extension services offered by hubs should focus on these subject areas. In doing so, there should be effective co-ordination at the national program and hub level with relevant service providers. These include those within the states and territories and the Australian Government agriculture portfolio.

**Recommendation 1: The role and function of the hubs should be clarified**

d) In line with the FDF's aim of building drought resilience including climate resilience, hubs should focus on improving the capacity of primary producers to manage risk and other generic skills essential for effective drought and climate resilience at the enterprise level.

## **Role of hubs in influencing change**

While some hubs described that they focus on transformational change, the available resources, short term funding commitments and multiple areas of focus indicate a significant gap between that aspiration and the hubs' practical operating realities. The review observed that most hubs seem to be delivering smaller projects seeking incremental or transitional change, which may be modest but seems more achievable given the hubs' resourcing and professional skills. Steady incremental change will be transformational over time in any case given the productivity challenges facing the agriculture industry.

The PC Inquiry Report recommended the FDF prioritise projects focusing on transformational actions as a way of enhancing the program's public benefit. This was an understandable attempt to define a distinctive role for the hubs early in their lives but experience with the program now suggests this is not realistic other than on an opportunistic basis. Transformational projects will typically involve greater costs, risks and uncertainties than are manageable for the hubs.

While transformational change will remain a key feature of the second phase of the FDF, there is a need to consider the unique context of each activity (DAFF 2025a). The department could consider this issue in providing clarity on the interactions between the hubs and the FDF generally, and in working arrangements with RDCs.

Hubs should continue to work with stakeholders and the community to deliver activities which collectively act to improve resilience within their region.



**Recommendation 1: The role and function of the hubs should be clarified**

e) Hubs should not generally be expected to prioritise projects focusing on transformational change, which is more of a role for research agencies like the CSIRO and the Research and Development Corporations with capacity to support higher risk projects, not small organisations operating at a local level.

**Other roles of the hub**

In its early years, the hub program expanded more rapidly than could be realistically managed. Before the hubs were able to establish a clear identity for themselves and with stakeholders, their role was extended and plans interrupted by COVID-19 uncertainty, travel restrictions and shutdowns. Hubs were engaged by the department to support the National Innovation Agenda (\$20 million to June 2023 across hubs combined) and to host soil management coordinators (\$3 million to January 2024 combined, with funding extended to 2028).

The department provided limited guidance on how the hubs should manage their expanded roles and priorities, and the hubs have struggled to integrate changing expectations into their organisational and operations structure. Some have sought to grow through accessing a wide range of grant programs while settling a mature identity and direction. This has been a reasonable response to uncertainty about longer term funding. The legacy of unresolved role clarity continues to affect the hubs and the program. Future decisions of government should avoid extending the role of hubs and complicating their identity until hubs are well established.

**Recommendation 2:** Governments should not expand the role and functions of the hubs for some time to allow the hubs, and the program generally, to become established with a clear identity. If additional functions are considered relevant at a later date, consultation with the hubs and stakeholders should be undertaken before roles are expanded. Changes to individual hub roles should not be considered until the hub has consistently demonstrated it meets the obligations of a revised funding agreement.

**National hub identity**

The difficulties in defining a role and work program have led to confusion among hub stakeholders, including some hub partners, about what sort of organisation hubs are and how they might engage and collaborate with them. With each hub approaching their role in a unique way, hubs have been unable to present themselves as a coordinated network with a clear identity. This has been reflected in the variation in naming and branding across individual hubs. Given the large number of parties operating in the RDEA&C landscape, a clear and recognisable identity is important for the hubs to be able to maximise their reach and sustain trusted relationships.

Awareness of the hubs and the work that they do is low, but growing over time. Where there is some awareness of the hubs, there is limited recognition of the Australian Government as the primary funder, or that each hub forms part of a connected national network. As the hubs attract more funds beyond their core hub funding, identifying the Australian Government's contribution and maintaining a visible link between the hubs and the Australian Government becomes even more difficult.

Most hubs have chosen not to include 'drought' in their name, and half use 'innovation'. This has helped to define the hubs' role and functions. Excluding 'drought' from their names is also relevant

nationally given that the meaning and consequences of drought differ so dramatically across Australia, and that many hubs have a practical focus on building resilience to climate variability.

To improve overall consistency across the program, and alignment with clarified roles, hubs should adopt a consistent name across all states and territories. Consistent naming and branding will improve hubs' identity and further establish each hub as part of a national program. The naming and branding protocol should be based on advice from the department. This hub name should reflect the roles of hubs, the FDF, and Commonwealth funding, and should not include '*drought hub*' in the title to reduce confusion about their 'in-drought' role. For example, 'FDF Extension and Adoption Hub – *Tasmania*'.

**Recommendation 3:** All hubs should adopt a consistent name and branding protocol based on advice from the department. A revised grant agreement should require that hubs transition at an appropriate time to an identity, name and branding that does not indicate a drought response role.

## 1.2 Collaboration with states and others

### Collaboration across the hub network

The review found that mechanisms for hub collaboration are improving; the Hub Directors Steering Committee has been a valuable network and has improved and fostered collaboration. The communities of practice have also been helpful. Cross-hub projects were considered particularly effective in accelerating collaboration and engagement, though they were limited in their size, scope and duration, with only 5 projects completed. Few hubs continued to collaborate on projects beyond the initial cross-hub projects.

Collaboration across the hub network should continue and could be expanded to include hubs staff and partners in more formalised ways. Cross-hub projects, collaboration and co-ordination should be prioritised and funded through the hubs core funding allocations.

**Recommendation 4:** The hub program and individual hubs should improve collaboration, including prioritising the development of cross hub projects.

### Collaboration with state, territory and Australian Government programs

Most hubs have found a gap in extension and adoption activities and have taken up those activities as their principal focus. This review recommends retaining and strengthening that focus, rather than spreading limited hub funds across the entire RDEA&C cycle.

Most state and territory governments retain an extension and adoption capacity, and consistent with the National Drought Agreement (20242029), the activities of hubs should seek to complement, rather than duplicate these activities. The department's hub program management should seek agreements with relevant state and territory governments to support this coordination and provide an assurance on 'additionality'.

The department should also seek to better integrate hubs' extension and adoption capability with RDCs, allowing for more opportunities for these organisations to focus on their strengths.

**Recommendation 5:** The hub program should ensure it adds value to existing extension and adoption offerings through co-ordination with the states, Research and Development Corporations and other relevant bodies. The department should have an agreement with the states and territories and relevant Australian Government organisations to support this co-ordination.

**Recommendation 6:** The government should integrate the hubs with the extension/adoption activities of the Research and Development Corporations to build on the extensive knowledge system the Australian Government has built in the Research and Development Corporations. We note that the then Australian Government minister made this commitment in 2022.

Beyond initial partnerships between hubs and state and territory governments, the department should also seek to identify potential specific gaps and opportunities for the hubs, by working with states and hubs to undertake a needs assessment. This recognises that the hubs are not operating in isolation (in fact it's already a busy space) and that hubs should be aiming to fill a gap or complement existing work rather than duplicating or competing with other entities and services.

**Recommendation 7:** The department should work with the states and hubs to undertake a needs assessment to inform hub activities and planning in each jurisdiction. This assessment should consider these needs in the context of FDF programs and planning generally, as well as state and territory programs and policies. This is important because the hubs are not working in a vacant space and the key to their success will be effective co-ordination with the many others working on matters contributing to increased resilience to the risks producers and land managers face. More rigour is needed across the hub program to ensure it is adding to existing services.

### 1.3 Legal and financial framework

There are a number of widely acknowledged problems embedded in the hubs' legal and financial model. These issues are discussed further in Chapter 6.2 and include:

- the substantial gap that has developed between the original plans for the hubs embodied in the grant agreements and the hubs as they have evolved
- challenges with the legal structure of the hubs, with Hub Directors generally not having the authority to employ staff and commit resources, hub staff having mixed loyalties (not being employed by the hub), and no-one having a formal responsibility to act in the best interests of the hub
- misalignment of authority, responsibility and accountability – as the principal funder and program manager the Australian Government is ultimately accountable for hub activities and spending, but has limited authority over and visibility of hub decision making beyond limited provisions in the grant agreement
- reliance on contracts that are likely to be unenforceable in practice – both between the Australian Government and the hub hosts, and between hubs and their partners
- financial reporting practices across hubs are inconsistent and appear to lack reliability

- reporting from hubs on financial co-contributions has been highly variable, lacking clarity and consistency in attributing cash and in-kind contributions to the model
- reliance on a large number of subcontracts to manage the program, which hamper reporting efforts and significantly increase the risk profile across the program.

Many of these issues arise from the grant agreement which establishes the hubs and governs the relationship between the Australian Government and host organisations. While it provided a framework for the hubs, the initial grant agreement didn't anticipate how the hubs would develop and has not allowed for sufficient scrutiny of hub activities. Although the department has attempted to resolve some issues with grant agreements through variations, a range of issues continue to exist that are inherent to the program model. Although it will be difficult to address these issues within the current model, this report suggests a range of revisions to the grant agreements will help to improve the overall framework.

Many of the governance issues identified in the hub program design stem from the fact that hubs are not independent legal entities and are reliant upon their host organisations (universities and a producer alliance) to employ staff, sign contracts and allocate hub resources. While this approach provides some benefits to the hubs (primarily in the form of office support, accommodation, financial and HR systems, IT and procurement support etc.), it creates confusion around the accountabilities of Hub Directors, 'advisory boards', host organisations and the Australian Government.

Under the current framework, the host organisations (rather than the hubs) are accountable to the Australian Government as the primary funder, and the department, on behalf of the government, is accountable for the use of hub funds. However, the current reporting mechanisms provide the department with limited visibility or influence over the use of funds by hubs and their partners, or the planning and procurement practices of the hubs.

The program is essentially relying on goodwill rather than conventional governance arrangements. Fortunately, there has been a strong supply of goodwill to date but it's a tenuous basis for a program that has so far spent almost \$100 m and is envisaged to spend around \$17 m annually over coming years.

While amendments to the current agreement may resolve some of the issues with this model, over the longer term the department should consider options to change the model of the hub program to enhance the legal status of hubs and improve accountability of hubs.

**Recommendation 8:** The department should consider options for implementing a more conventional legal and governance framework for the hub program. This may include establishing the hubs as independent entities, locating the hubs with another Australian Government related entity or through an arrangement with State and Territory governments.

## Hub governance and staffing

Current governance arrangements for each hub are variable in their structure and composition. While many hubs have advisory boards or steering committees that advise on hub activities, the size and membership of these advisory bodies varies greatly across the different hubs, and in most cases

do not have a formal legal status. Hub boards are generally not skill based, and some do not have any representation from the Australian Government (and in some cases, do not include the Hub Director).

When functioning well, hub governance structures could enable a platform to share ideas and make good decisions, and include views from stakeholders across the region. However, there are also risks that these governance structures can limit the reach of hubs and be used by partners to further their own organisational agendas.

There are significant differences in governance structures and operations between the hubs, and the Australian Government should set standards for effective and efficient governance across hubs, as well as outlining expectations for oversight of the hubs.

At a minimum, these should include hubs having an advisory board, with an agreed Terms of Reference between the Australian Government and the host organisation, with membership comprising:

- an independent chair with relevant expertise
- a representative from the department
- a representative of the grantee
- a representative from the relevant state or territory government
- the Hub Director
- representatives from partners reflecting a range of interests, which does not comprise more than half of the board's membership.

The department should have greater involvement in the recruitment and appointment of key hub staff – including the Hub Director (who where possible, should have practical experience with primary producers and regional communities) and the independent chairs. This should include consultation regarding potential candidates, and a right to veto candidates.

In addition to strengthening the requirements around the appointment of key leadership positions for hubs, the grant agreement should also be revised to be less prescriptive around which hub staff roles are required, such as knowledge brokers or adoption officers. While hubs have broadly complied with the requirements in the current grant agreement, the roles played by people with the same job title have been very different across different hubs. Streamlining these requirements can provide the hubs with more flexibility about how they arrange their staffing and reduce confusion for stakeholders dealing with multiple hubs.

**Recommendation 9a:** Revise the grant agreement establishing the hubs to require that hubs have an advisory board, with an agreed Terms of Reference between the Australian Government and the host organisation, with membership comprising:

- an independent chair with relevant expertise
- a representative from the department
- a representative of the grantee

- a representative from the relevant state or territory government
- the Hub Director
- representatives from partners reflecting a range of interests, which does not comprise more than half of the board's membership.

**Recommendation 9b:** Revise the grant agreement establishing the hubs to require that hubs consult with the department regarding the appointment of key hub staff (including the Hub Director and independent chair of the advisory board).

**Recommendation 10:** Revise the grant agreement to be less prescriptive about how the hubs should be staffed. With the exception of key leadership roles (such as Hub Director), hubs should be able to determine their required skills and personnel.

## Accountability of hubs

While the current grant agreement includes a number of mechanisms to provide Commonwealth oversight of the hubs, these are generally not seen as effective. The terms of the grant agreement are too generic and difficult to apply and enforce and have not been sufficiently revised as issues have been identified and the role of the hubs has evolved.

Despite the deficiencies identified in hub reporting, the primary grant agreement does not give the Australian Government appropriate tools to validate reports. It also does not provide adequate mechanisms to withhold funding for inconsistent or insufficient data, requiring the department to accept inconsistent or incomplete data. This is not the fault of hub staff, it is largely a systems problem and the MEL and reporting regime and requirements are not effective for both the department and the hubs.

Such issues with data are commonplace, with a heavy notional reliance on contracts – including the grant agreement with the host organisations and the Australian Government, as well as between the hubs and their partners and service providers through subcontracts. The volume of contracts and subcontracts make it very difficult for the program to be effectively managed, and the numerous layers of contracts and reporting filtering between hubs, partners and the department provides a significant impediment to effective reporting on finances and co-contributions.

The grant agreement for the hubs should ensure there is a clear link between reporting, delivery milestones and the release of funding to hubs. The mechanisms to withhold funding or hold organisations accountable if reporting is inadequate or milestones are not met should also be strengthened – as in their current form the department has minimal scope to enforce the terms of the contract.

The grant agreement should also include clearer guidance to hubs on what can be counted as in-kind contributions. The current scope of contributions is very broad and has been built up over time based on advice provided by the hubs management team – these guidelines should be revised and clarified, including ensuring consistent reporting on in-kind contributions across hubs.

With in-kind requirements in place, hubs are unlikely to be able to stop relying on subcontracts entirely. However, the guidance included in the grant agreement should be strengthened to reduce a reliance on subcontracts. Where subcontracts are used by hubs, they should ideally be used to

facilitate the transfer of funds for a specific purpose. Hubs should also ensure they have the ability to monitor and manage performance of subcontractors, and report on those activities and expenditure to the department.

**Recommendation 11:** Revise the grant agreement establishing the hubs to:

- a) simplify and strengthen the reporting and accountability mechanisms, including tools for the department to manage hubs where requirements are not being met
- b) provide clearer guidance on in-kind contributions from host organisations and partners, including how they should be reported to the department.

Regardless of changes to the grant agreement (or the overall model of the hub program), there are likely to still be challenges in ensuring compliance from hubs, and the long-term success of the program will continue to require careful and proactive management by the department throughout the term of the grant agreement.

**Recommendation 12:** The department is to ensure the program has more active supervision, and the capacity to identify and manage hub performance and conduct concerns.

## Availability of hub information

The review has observed that hubs share information to variable extents. While some hubs have effective websites with updated information and a repository of resources, others had websites that were difficult to navigate or had only high-level information on projects. This was also the case for key hub partners – while some had clear information on hub projects publicly available, there were also cases where outputs of hub projects were difficult to locate or not publicly available.

Given the current and expected role of hubs in extension and adoption, hubs should be able to leverage their online presence to help distribute information to producers and communities. Information from hub projects should be publicly available, and subcontracts with hub partners should prevent resources created from hub projects being restricted or requiring a fee to access.

**Recommendation 13:** Revise the grant agreement to ensure that outputs of hub projects are publicly available and that hub websites provide comprehensive information on hub projects.

## Intellectual Property (IP)

The objective of the FDF Act is to enhance the public good by building drought resilience. The *Future Drought Fund (Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2024–2028) Determination 2024* provides more detail, stating that:

the benefits generated from funding under the FDF should be able to be accessed and or shared by many rather than be captured solely by individual businesses or industries for private commercial gain... Wherever activities could deliver both public and private benefits, relevant decisions should seek to leverage private or industry co-contributions (financial or in kind) to offset private gains, where appropriate, and maximise outcomes.



The grant agreement obliges hubs to grant the Commonwealth a permanent royalty-free licence to all material produced through the grant. The hub must also ensure all research, data, outputs and outcomes, including those developed by the hub, members and partners, are made publicly and freely available.

The review heard that this intellectual policy clause has hampered opportunities for hub collaboration and partnerships, particularly with RDCs, which have their own policies designed to protect and exploit their IP. Hubs should have the discretion to agree on mutually beneficial IP access arrangements, including limited use and time access. With a renewed focus on extension and adoption, hubs are unlikely to focus on generating valuable IP (for example, patents of innovative technology or copyright to groundbreaking research) therefore should have no concerns making any IP they may generate publicly available.

**Recommendation 14:** The department should revise the intellectual property clauses in the grant agreement to allow hubs to partner with research organisations on a more flexible basis.

Many hubs observed that the short-term funding provided to date has impaired their ability to build relationships with stakeholders and attract professional staff. This was particularly an issue in more remote locations, where staff may have to relocate to undertake hub roles.

Through the [Future Drought Fund Investment Strategy](#), additional funding for the hubs is planned for 6 years from 2026–27. A new agreement should cover this entire period, with the question of new funding revisited well in advance of the end of the period to prevent short-term extensions to hub funding.

With a new grant agreement likely to be in place for a longer period of time, the department's capacity to make significant revisions will be limited. Whilst the grant agreement should be reviewed by the department annually to assure currency, an additional mechanism should be put in place to clarify aspects of the grant agreement and outline new priorities for hubs. This could be achieved through a letter from either the Minister or the departmental secretary, modelled on a Statement of Expectations issued to Australian Government entities by Ministers. While these letters would be subordinate to the agreement with hubs, they would allow for specific clarifications and guidance which can be varied on a regular schedule without needing to amend the agreement.

**Recommendation 15:** The revised grant agreement should aim for longer-term funding certainty, subject to performance. Short term funding is incompatible with the overall objective of changing behaviour to improve risk management – that is inherently a long-term project requiring consistent and ongoing educational programs. Short term funding has also led to high levels of staff turnover in some hubs which is also inimical to success given the importance of relationships and networks to the hubs. This is especially the case for the hubs' engagement with First Nations organisations and communities.

**Recommendation 16:** The grant agreement should allow for and be accompanied by communication from the Minister or Secretary setting out their expectations of the hubs, grant recipient and Hub Directors, which is renewed on a regular basis and includes clarification as necessary on the grant agreement, cross-hub and national priorities.

An interim statement of expectations should also be issued to existing hubs within the next 12 months, highlighting the primary role of hubs, early improvements in governance, decisions on the matters recommended in this report and key priorities for the remainder of the initial grant agreement.

## Role of the Regional Investment Corporation (RIC) Board

In developing any FDF grants or arrangements, the Minister is required to consult with the RIC Board to ensure that they align with the Funding Plan. While this process is intended to ensure that the use of FDF funds is consistent with the Funding Plan, several reviews and inquiries including the Review of the Operation of the *Regional Investment Corporation Act 2018* (Craik, 2024) and the PC Inquiry (PC 2023), noted that these arrangements ‘provide limited benefit’ and ‘require resourcing from both the RIC and the Department which could be better used elsewhere’ (Craik, 2024).

This is primarily due to the timing of advice being sought (the RIC Board is only consulted once a program has been fully designed) as well as the limitations of the RIC Board’s advice (whereby the RIC Board is intended to advise whether a program is consistent with the Funding Plan).

While this requirement has not caused any direct challenges to the hub program, there have also been no benefits from seeking the RIC Board’s advice – particularly around changes to grant agreements. As such, the review panel agrees with previous recommendations that the RIC Board’s role under the FDF Act should be removed.

**Recommendation 17:** The legislated role of the Regional Investment Corporation Board in providing advice on FDF grants should be removed in line with recommendations of previous reviews.

## 1.4 Program governance

The evaluation of the hubs noted a range of challenges with the department’s governance of the program, including resource constraints and high staff turnover throughout much of the establishment phase of the hub program. While these problems have lessened with more permanent staffing in the hubs management team and the success of cross-hub communities of practice (COPs), this review has identified a number of widely acknowledge problems with the hub program that will require clear guidance and ongoing attention from the department to resolve, including more meaningful engagement and oversight from the department.

### The Hubs Advisory Committee

While the Hubs Advisory Committee (HAC) had some initial success in providing oversight and improving the effectiveness of the hubs, the review noted that the HAC’s ability to support the hubs was reliant on its ability to travel and engage with hubs. Since the reduction in the capacity to engage with the hubs in 2023, the HAC has been largely ineffective in working with hubs to clarify their roles, support their performance and report to the Minister. Despite having a terms of reference not dissimilar to this review, the HAC has not informed the Minister on the many deficiencies in the program identified by this review and those it has consulted.

As much of the HAC’s briefing in recent years has been provided by the department’s hubs management team, the department is well placed to advise on the performance of the hubs to the Minister.

The FDFCC receives updates on the status of the hub program at its regular FDFCC meetings. To date, the FDFCC has also had a limited role in advising the hubs to improve effectiveness. However, as an independent advisory group formed under the FDF Act and comprised of skills-based experts in sustainability, drought resilience, economics, climate change, innovation and rural and regional development, they are well-placed to provide the Minister and hubs with advice.

**Recommendation 18:** The Hub Advisory Committee (HAC) should be dissolved, with the department and Future Drought Fund Consultative Committee (FDFCC) providing advice on the hub program and individual hubs to the Minister directly.

## Central coordination of activities

In evaluating the hubs, this review found there was a significant amount of duplication between hubs, and that the overall hub program could be more effective if some functions and activities were undertaken once and at a program level rather than repeated by the individual hubs.

In some cases, these activities (such as managing a register of hub projects and resources, some MEL activities) may be best undertaken by the department. Alternatively, a single hub could coordinate these activities on behalf of all hubs – this could be negotiated as a part of the legal framework for the hub and resourced appropriately.

**Recommendation 19:** The department facilitate the delivery of some hub activities and systems (including communications and maintenance of a registry of projects and resources) once and centrally, rather than leaving individual hubs to make individual investments in these areas. This could be undertaken by the department or one hub on behalf of the program. Over time, it will be more efficient for various systems and services to be developed and provided centrally at a program level.

## MEL and reporting

Although the hubs have put significant resources into reporting, including in some cases hiring specialist MEL staff, MEL reporting that has reached the department focused heavily on monitoring, without much evidence of learning or evaluation taking place within hubs or at the program level. Inconsistent reporting practices often mean that reports present incomplete or unclear information. The hub staff are not primarily responsible for these deficiencies.

Challenges with MEL reporting are in part due to a lack of coordinated MEL framework for the program, as well as the establishment of MEL indicators early in the program which have not been sufficiently updated as the role of the hubs has evolved. There has also been an emphasis on volume metrics rather than quality/outcomes reporting which has wasted hub and the department's resources.

Despite the amount of MEL reporting being provided by the hubs, there is a lack of clarity among hubs on how the reports are used. Several hubs also noted that they had undertaken their own MEL activities which could not be included in their MEL reporting due to the format and templating of the reports.

Moving forward, a program specific MEL framework should be developed for the hubs, in line with the current role and activities being undertaken by the hubs. The reporting burden on the hubs could be reduced by centrally coordinating MEL activities within the FDF to the extent possible, rather than the hubs. This could also provide opportunities for comparisons of MEL activities across the different FDF programs.

Similar to MEL reporting, the remainder of hub reporting has tended to provide a volume of information that often does not present a consistent picture of hub activities. As such, these reports should also be simplified to reduce the volume of reporting generated by hubs, and to increase their effectiveness. In particular, rather than trying to capture all hub outputs, reporting should focus on outcomes and expenditure to provide a consistent, accurate data set that clearly articulates what hubs are achieving, and how hub funds are being spent.

**Recommendation 20:** A monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework should be developed for the hub program, including performance indicators and methodology. MEL reporting should have greater clarity around content and sequencing, to minimise duplication in hub reporting.

**Recommendation 21:** Hub reporting obligations should be simplified, allowing streamlined and effective reporting. Reporting should focus on:

- financial management and resource allocation
- program activities (key milestones and deliverables)
- outcomes, even if they are difficult to identify and describe.

## 1.5 Geographical structure and coverage

### Geographical structure

The hub program aimed to support a specific set of new Australian Government funded services closer to local communities. This is a worthy objective but has been implemented in a way that has not acknowledged cost and efficiency implications of the model, nor sought ‘additionality’ to existing services. These issues should be addressed to make the most of the program’s limited resources.

The current geographical structure of the hubs aims to broadly reflect climatic and agricultural zones across Australia, and, in northern Australia, the hubs are not defined by state and territory borders. Whilst the current geographical structure has enabled widespread involvement of distributed regional universities and partners, a lack of alignment with state and territory borders has created challenges in collaboration and co-ordination, particularly with government agencies. If the hubs had been specialising in areas that are not primarily state based this would not have mattered, but we can now see that it does matter for several reasons.

Across most jurisdictions governments provide on-ground extension and adoption services on natural resource management and agriculture, and there was an expectation that the agencies who deliver these services were included in hub design or as partners. The review considers it critical that hubs have strong relationship is with the relevant state and territory departments and should aim to add to existing government services in a coordinated and planned way.

Operating realities have led some hubs in this direction already. The hubs model has generally worked better where there is clear geographical alignment with state jurisdictions, facilitating greater formal and informal relationships with state agencies and enabling meaningful collaboration and co-ordination. In some cases, state departments have appeared very influential over hub priorities which has also created tensions. Improving governance structures will help to ensure alignment of interests across each hub.

Maintaining a single hub in each state and territory (excluding ACT) would assist to develop strong, productive links between relevant government departments and the hubs. The Government should discuss with the WA and NT Governments an arrangement for the NT and northern WA given that region's practical separation from the producer based hub in southern WA.

**Recommendation 22:** There should be one hub per state and territory (excluding ACT). The relevant state department should be a partner to the hub in their jurisdiction. This structure would recognise the most critical hub relationship is with the relevant department, its primacy as the historical extension services provider, and add to the capacity of the Australian, state and territory governments to collaborate on drought and climate resilience. The Government should discuss with the WA and NT Governments an arrangement for the NT and northern WA given that region's practical separation from the producer based hub in southern WA.

## Geographical coverage (and scale)

Hubs need regional relevance to be effective but achieving a physical presence across each region has been problematic for individual hubs. The 8 relatively small hub organisations have not been able to comprehensively deliver local or regional services across the enormous and diverse areas they cover, and they should not be expected to do so.

While it is evident that the lack of role and functional clarity has undermined effective local engagement, a major issue limiting the hubs has been the practical disparity between small organisations with limited budgets notionally working across very large areas and diverse industries, some of which are extremely difficult to service.

For some hubs, creating regional nodes has been critical to enabling widespread coverage. However, employing node staff in partner organisations is complex, and the value they bring to the hubs is unclear. Node staff are frequently employed on a part time basis and may not have access to project funds. In more centralised hubs (which do not rely on nodes), networks of staff and partners were set up to act as a local point of reference for information and hub priorities. The hubs also rely on the internet to distribute information, as do producers.

The primary way hubs have sought to deliver services across wide areas has been to work through partners, rather than developing on-ground relationship with producers directly. This approach is realistic and is a targeted way for hubs to minimise duplication, unintentional undercutting of other activities and engagement fatigue – all of which can occur in regions with mature extension and adoption services provided by government agencies and others.

Some hubs could have greater impact through more targeted focus rather than attempting to establish a personal presence across an entire geographic area. Some hubs have already come to this realisation and are stepping back from a network of nodes.

Whether hubs aim to achieve broad coverage should reflect regional circumstances including the existence of relevant partners, the geographic area they service and the nature of the regional industries.

The Australian Government, in consultation with state departments and partners, should have the capacity to influence decisions on the most appropriate operating approach, recognising that comprehensive coverage will always be limited by resourcing constraints.

**Recommendation 23:** The hubs should focus on projects with a realistic prospect of achieving an impact. Aiming for broad geographical and industrial coverage may be inconsistent with this, and the hubs should be supported in giving priority to impact. While hubs should continue to build networks with stakeholders across their regions, there should not be a requirement or expectation for physical presences or 'shopfronts'. The hubs primary vehicle for providing services will be grower and community groups rather than individual producers.

## Resource profile and coverage

Each hub has had to make judgements about funds committed to staffing or to projects. Most hubs have sought to achieve a balance of both, but some hubs have heavily prioritised staff employment, with minimal funding available for projects. This does not appear to have been an optimal resource allocation or way for hubs to achieve impact.

The review does not consider there is a case to change the current funding profile across hubs. However, there is a need to consider how hubs achieve a balance between funding staff, activities and administrative costs to ensure hub staff and activities can have a meaningful impact.

Some consideration is also needed on the proportion of funds allocated to developing applied research or through scholarships (PhD, honours). The review considers funds allocated to these activities should be minimal, with the majority of funding being available to support extension and adoption activities.

**Recommendation 24:** Hubs should plan how they intend to balance their expenditure on staffing and project activities. These expenditures on staffing and projects should be transparent and accessible for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

## 1.6 FDF Alignment

### Other FDF program and grant opportunities

The hub program was one of the first FDF programs. As other programs and associated grant processes were rolled out, there has been an increasing expectation by some hubs and stakeholders that the hubs should play a role in promoting other FDF programs, providing advice, and co-ordinating grant applications across their region. There have also been expectations placed on grant applicants to liaise and link in with their regional hub on priorities when developing proposals and delivering grants.

This FDF promotion and co-ordination role has caused some confusion for hubs. There is little in the hubs' grant agreement on such a role, other than that adoption officers were expected to

disseminate information about the FDF and support farmers use the tools developed through the FDF. In practice, hubs have not had any further insights or knowledge of other FDF programs, beyond what is publicly accessible, making their role to promote and co-ordinate other FDF programs difficult at times. The Investment Strategy, published in early 2025, should address this issue in part by forecasting the FDF grant opportunities.

Some hubs have elected to engage closely with FDF programs – developing grant proposals and applying for funds on behalf of their host organisation or partners. For many this has been a strategic decision, necessary to increase the hub's capacity and ability to have an impact. While this approach fosters collaboration and may create better, more informed, successful FDF project proposals, it can lead to the situation where hub program resources are used to bid for further FDF funding. The hubs' role in applying for FDF grants has been viewed as a conflict of interest by some stakeholders. This tension has been compounded in regions where non-hub partners feel excluded from the hubs' engagement activities, and where hub partners are competing for access to programs.

The role of the hubs in relation to other FDF programs should be managed through an operating protocol and role clarification. This will not satisfy all parties but would at least be explicit on the Government's expectations and FDF access planning. A general observation could be that the hubs should not promote other FDF programs, act on behalf of the FDF, or use hub resources to compete for FDF funding.

However, given the hubs' relatively small budget, broad remit and the government's intention that they will have a discernible local impact, it is not practical to restrict hubs, through their host organisations, or partner organisations, from involvement in FDF grant opportunities. The department should develop and publish a protocol for hub engagement in the FDF programs generally and grant application processes. In particular, it should be clear to hubs, their staff and other interested parties how the hubs may be involved in FDF grant programs, including addressing the use of hub funds and hub funded staff to apply for other FDF grant opportunities.

**Recommendation 25:** The department should implement a protocol that addresses concerns about conflicts of interest and competitive equity and ensures that hubs (for and through partners) are competing for grant funds on a basis that is understood by the public and other grant applicants. This may limit the hubs playing a more significant role in FDF program delivery, however desirable that might be on other grounds.

## Alignment with other FDF programs

The FDF Investment Strategy (2025) facilitates better planning, sequencing and coordination of FDF programs and investments. It distinguishes the hub program from other FDF programs as providing regionally focused information and support to develop, extend and encourage the adoption of drought resilient technologies and practices.

To date, hubs have been involved in activities including mental and social resilience, information gathering and sharing, capacity building projects and projects aiming to support First Nations people and communities in agricultural areas. These individual activities overlap with the intentions of other FDF programs also aiming to provide these services.



To support alignment across the FDF, some state and territory departments have established committees to oversee the delivery of FDF programs and to clarify the role confusion between the work of the hubs and other FDF programs. These committees aimed to improve communication around program priorities and activities, and to clarify the objectives of different FDF programs.

The department should work with hubs to provide guidance and strategic alignment with other FDF program activities. It should be clear how the hub program complements or provides a unique value comparative to other FDF programs. This could be achieved within program planning documentation to ensure activities offered by individual hubs are not duplicative of other FDF program efforts or are intentionally designed to complement other FDF programs.

**Recommendation 26:** The department should clearly identify and describe how the program's purpose complements and interacts with other FDF programs. This could be achieved within program planning documentation and public facing descriptions of FDF programs. The program should not duplicate, or overlap with the purpose of other FDF programs, such as Farm Business Resilience, Regional Drought Resilience Planning and other programs aimed at improving resilience for producers and communities.

## First Nations engagement

Engagement with First Nations communities was an important role expected of hubs, formalised in the grant opportunity guidelines. Hubs have sought to engage with First Nations communities in a variety of ways. Most hubs have faced challenges engaging effectively, constrained by their ability to build trust due to short term funding, staff turnover and lack of clarity about what their service offering is for these communities. Some hubs have tried to achieve enhanced First Nations engagement by employing a dedicated First Nations Officer.

Since the hub program was first established, the FDF has advanced further programs and initiatives to support First Nations engagement. The Investment Strategy states that increased participation and outcomes for First Nations peoples is a priority for all FDF programs, supported and boosted by the parallel FDF First Nations Initiatives program. This program includes a complementary funding stream to support First Nations-led projects. A First Nations Advisory Group has been established to help inform culturally appropriate program design and activity across the FDF.

The department should consider preparing an FDF First Nations engagement strategy, which could consider how the hub program could interact with other FDF programs and activities to ensure meaningful First Nation engagement.

**Recommendation 27:** First Nations engagement should be conducted in a co-ordinated way with other FDF activities and programs, and existing Australian Government, state and territory programs. Guidance on reasonable expectations and regionally specific priorities should be developed by the hubs and the department (e.g. production agriculture, land management) as part of that broader process.

The acknowledgement and appropriate management of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) is a key consideration of hubs' First Nations Engagement. Every Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community has unique and special ICIP. ICIP is dynamic and living and comes in many forms, including knowledge about stories, places or rituals, writing, ceremonies, language, language, artistic work, secret or sacred information ([Arts Law Centre of Australia 2011](#)). Through engagement

activities, co-design processes and activity implementation, the hubs may use, access and in some cases manage a range of diverse ICIP. For example, hub activities have included cultural exchange symposiums, First Nations Knowledge brokers, initiatives including 'Conversations on Country' and Yarning Circles which involved the transfer of knowledge. In some cases, hubs have acknowledged that they have incorporated traditional knowledge into drought resilience strategies.

A management strategy, with appropriate guidelines and ICIP protocols or principles (including consideration of IP clauses in grant agreements) has yet to be developed within the hub program, or FDF at large. CSIRO have considered how they interact with ICIP and have developed guiding principles to guide research and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Individuals, communities and organisations (CSIRO 2024). This could provide an example approach for the FDF in addressing ICIP across its programs.

**Recommendation 28:** The department should develop guidance on the use, access and appropriate management of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property to support hubs and other FDF programs.

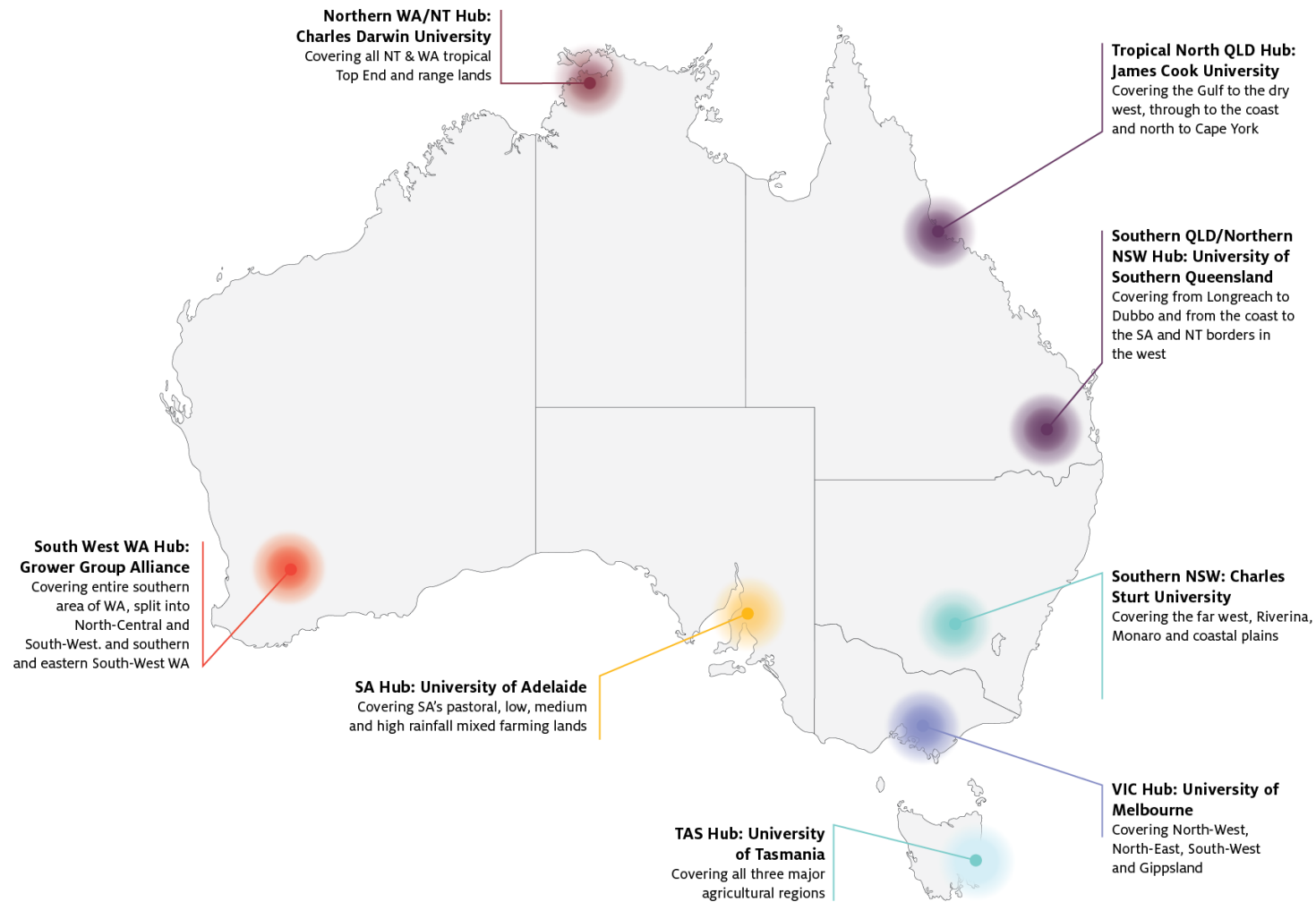
# Introduction

## About the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs

The FDF commenced in September 2019 with the aim of providing a long term and strategic approach to drought resilience and preparedness, via various areas of targeted activity. Within the FDF, the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub program (hub program) was established to bring together pre-existing research and to accelerate its uptake through extension, adoption, testing and scaling up of new solutions, and commercialisation.

Eight hub regions were defined by the Australian Government, based on key agricultural and climatic zones. Hub host organisations were selected via a competitive grant round. The successful hub host organisations and regions are shown in Figure 1. Seven of the 8 hubs are hosted within universities, except for the South-West WA Hub which is led by the Grower Group Alliance.

Figure 1 Hub regions and host organisations



Source: DAFF 2025b

## Productivity Commission findings

The Productivity Commission (PC) undertook a review of FDF programs ([Inquiry Report: Review of Part 3 of the Future Drought Fund Act](#)), and tabled findings in September 2023. In relation to the hub program, the PC found:

The Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs are fostering regional collaboration but there is confusion about their purpose, responsibilities and governance. (PC 2023)

The PC Inquiry Report suggested that the main role for government in the hub program is ‘to overcome information barriers and broader coordination failures. They also support knowledge sharing and extension and adoption’ (PC 2023).

The PC found that there was scope to improve the accountability of the hubs and the clarity of their role in place-based engagement, including with First Nations peoples, and the links to other FDF programs:

There has been some uncertainty about the role of hubs and concerns they are duplicating or competing with (and missing opportunities to collaborate with) established services and networks. (PC 2023)

The PC unpacked the intention for hubs to address gaps in extension and adoption. The inquiry also noted that hub governance could be improved (PC 2023). Follow-up actions specific to the hubs were included in Recommendation 7.4 (Box 1).

### Box 1 Recommendation 7.4 of the Productivity Commission Inquiry Report on the FDF

Funding for the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs should be extended for 2 years in the next funding plan period, with continued funding for each hub depending on a satisfactory mid-term performance review.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry should also release a public Statement of Expectations for the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub program and individual hubs.

Following the PC’s advice, as part of the 2024–25 budget, \$28 million was allocated over 2 years from 2024–25 to 2025–26 for the hubs to continue their activities, while this review was undertaken. The review seeks to inform longer-term opportunities for the hubs from July 2026, with \$104 million over 6 years earmarked from 2026–27 in the FDF Investment Strategy.

## Summary of scope of work

The review was undertaken in 2 parts, as outlined in the review’s terms of reference ([Appendix A](#)). Part 1 sought to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the hub program since its establishment, including governance and operations of the hub program, plus a review of the performance of individual hubs. This feeds into Part 2, providing an overarching assessment with recommendations for the future of the hub program (Part 2).

Both parts of this project have been completed in parallel by a common team. Considerations have included:

- the extent to which hubs are meeting the expectations of their grant agreements, the intended outcomes of the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework, and the objectives of the Future Drought Fund Act 2019 to ‘enhance the public good by building drought resilience’
- existing governance, administration, operation and delivery structures of the hubs and the department
- key issues raised by the PC inquiry report and prior FDF consultation findings
- how the hubs interact with other FDF programs
- the hub program’s performance in driving a step change in the application of effective drought resilience practices and technologies
- The review does not re-prosecute the 2020–21 decision to create the hubs or to consider how these funds may have been used differently towards similar goals.

Several lines of inquiry were established at the start of the review to define how to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of each hub and the hub program. This included questions and considerations regarding individual hubs’ approaches and various aspects of hub governance. See the full lines of inquiry at [Appendix B](#).

The review sought to understand the status and future directions for each of the 8 hubs. This included analysis of each hub’s approach, priorities, projects, delivery models, partners, stakeholders, financial allocation, risks, arising issues, and other relevant information.

The review also investigated the following lines of inquiry on individual hub performance:

- What is the hub delivering?
- What is the hub’s implementation approach?
- How has the hub engaged the sector and community?
- How well has the hub operated (efficiency)?
- What has the hub achieved (effectiveness)?

The review also looked across the hub program as a whole, focusing on the following elements that are critical to delivering and supporting the hub program:

- governance – committees, oversight, decision-making structures
- operations – project management, systems, staffing, risk management
- stakeholders – engagement, communications
- financial – procurement, contracts, phasing, acquittals
- measurement and reporting – outputs, outcomes, impact

This aspect considered how other FDF and government programs have influenced the work of the hubs.

The review investigated the following lines of inquiry in relation to hub program governance:

- How effective are the hub program's governance arrangements?
- How effective are the hub program's operational supports?
- How effectively are stakeholders supported across the hub program?
- How effectively are finances managed across the hub program?
- How effectively are measurement and reporting processes across the hub program?

## Challenges in judging success of the hubs

Several factors complicated the task of judging the efficiency and effectiveness of hubs and the hub program. A few key points are listed here, to contextualise the contents in the review report:

- There has been a relatively short timeframe since the commencement of the hub program (contracts were signed in June 2021), so quantifiable outcomes and flow-on impacts in most cases are not readily apparent.
- The hub program model offered a high degree of flexibility to hubs to define their roles, operational structures, governance, staffing, projects and involvement in other activities outside the hubs. As a result, there are large differences across hubs, which has made it complex to compare their efficiency and effectiveness.
- The priorities and projects of each hub leveraged a regional co-design process, so each hub shaped a different set of priorities and associated delivery approaches.
- The geographical differences faced by each hub, both physically and in relation to their stakeholder context, resulted in responses that were context-specific and non-comparable across hubs. What works in one place would not in another.
- The lack of a baseline dataset or pre-determined set of drought resilience indicators for each region has made it difficult to collect and analyse the efficiency and effectiveness of each hub and the hub program as a whole in a reliable manner.
- Much of the information reported by hubs has been qualitative and output-oriented in nature, with limited outcome information to enable quantitative judgements regarding effectiveness.

Rather than seeking to assess hubs individually, the review has sought to compare and contrast the different approaches they have taken, with the aim of highlighting areas that appear to be good practice and other areas where there are clear lessons. Findings about areas of concern are addressed in the review recommendations (see [Review and recommendations](#)).

## Data collection methodology

### Desktop data review

The review panel examined available information about the hubs via a desktop review process. Information reviewed included:

- Grant Opportunity Guidelines
- grant agreements



- operational plans
- activity work plans
- monitoring and evaluation plans
- monitoring and evaluation reports
- progress reports
- submissions by hubs to other reviews (e.g. PC inquiry report, public consultation on the Funding Plan (2024–2028), public consultation on the Australian Government Drought Plan (2024–2029))
- documentation from hub engagement with the department
- Ministerial letters and correspondence
- financial reports
- hub websites
- related materials.

Additional information about the hub program was sought directly from the department, including the HAC and FDFCC meeting agendas and minutes. See [Appendix B](#) for further information about the data collection process.

## Targeted consultation

The review panel consulted with a broad range of stakeholders, including hubs and related stakeholders. This provided many stakeholders with an opportunity to share their views on the hub program, individual hubs and their own activities. This also allowed for analysis of hub program governance and future enhancements.

The review panel conducted online and face-to-face interviews with each hub. The panel also met state and territory government agriculture agencies, industry representative organisations, FDF governance committees, research organisations and departmental representatives. A full list of stakeholders the review panel spoke with is at [Appendix C](#).

## Written submissions

The review also included a public submissions process. This involved inviting written submissions from interested parties in response to a set of questions posed in an Issues Paper. This helped to gather targeted feedback about the hubs, while providing ideas about future directions for the hub program. The review received 27 responses, including from hubs, hub host organisations, hub partners, industry groups, RDCs, state and territory governments, and individual farmers and producers. The full list of submitters is at [Appendix D](#).

# Context for hubs

This chapter explores the history of drought support in Australia, the policy issues framing the development of the FDF and the hub program, and other policies and initiatives that exist alongside the hub program to support drought resilience. This chapter details the National Drought Agreement (2018), the *Future Drought Fund Act 2019*, and the Funding Plan (2020–2024), plus recent revisions, as key policy and legislative pieces that influenced the FDF and hub program.

## 3.1 Drought in Australia

### Environmental context

Drought is one of the most impactful and costly climate challenges affecting Australia. Among the key impacts are crop failures, livestock losses, bushfires, dust storms and land degradation. Extended periods of dry conditions can also be a contributor to flooding when widespread rain falls.

Australia is prone to drought due to its geography and key climate drivers (BOM 2021). The far north and south of the country are influenced by regular rain-bearing systems for parts of each year, and the east coast receives moisture from weather systems originating in the Tasman and Coral Seas. However, most of the country has relatively low rainfall and unpredictable patterns.

Australia experiences recurrent drought cycles. Different regions, industries and farmers across Australia may be at different stages of the drought cycle at any one time. While Australian farmers are used to the cyclical nature of agriculture, drought events are predicted to increase in duration, frequency and severity in the coming decades (CSIRO & BOM 2020; IPCC 2021a; IPCC 2021b & Kirono et al. 2020).

### Economic context

Agriculture has traditionally underpinned Australia's regional economies and remains important for both regional and national prosperity. In 2022–23, the sector accounted for 13.6% of Australian goods and services exports (ABARES 2024), with 81% of the agriculture workforce residing in regional areas (ABARES 2023). Agriculture also has linkages through the supply chain and interdependencies with other sectors of the economy.

Farm business performance depends on many factors, including weather conditions. Drought presents a key risk for Australia's farming businesses as it can lead to sharp reductions in output, productivity and incomes. Drought can also result in hardship and have significant negative effects on the physical and mental health of farmers and the wellbeing of their families and broader communities.

Acknowledging these impacts, government has a key role to assist farm businesses and communities to plan for drought, and to build their preparedness for these conditions (DAFF 2024a).

## 3.2 Past drought policy

### Historic drought policy

Since the 1970s, the Australian Government's approach to drought and the support it provides has changed drastically. From 1971 to 1989, drought was treated as a natural disaster, allowing affected people to be helped through joint Commonwealth-State Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements.

Drought was removed from the National Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements in 1989, following a review, which found that it was poorly targeted, distorted farm input prices and worked as a disincentive for farmers to prepare for drought. It is now recognised that drought and disasters require different responses. Droughts are distinct from natural disasters as they are slower in their onset, easier to predict in their effects and are generally more gradual which provides opportunities for farming businesses and communities to prepare and make adjustments as droughts progress. (DAFF 2024a).

In 1992, the first National Drought Policy was established. One of its objectives was to encourage primary producers and other sections of rural Australia to adopt self-reliant approaches to managing climate variability (DAFF 2024b). From 1997 to 2012, Exceptional Circumstances (EC) arrangements were used to trigger financial support for farmers in EC declared areas. For a drought to be declared as EC, it had to be considered a rare and severe event that did not occur more than once every 20 to 25 years, resulting in a rare and severe downturn in farm income over a prolonged period, and not predictable or part of a structural adjustment process.

Over time, EC arrangements were shown to be inequitable. [The Productivity Commission Inquiry Report on Government Drought Support \(2009\)](#) found that these programs did not help farmers to improve their self-reliance, preparedness and management of climate change (PC 2009). In 2012, the last EC declarations lapsed.

In 2013, Australian, state and territory ministers for primary industries signed the [Intergovernmental Agreement on National Drought Program Reform](#). This agreement was the beginning of a new approach to drought planning, resilience and response, which sought to change perspectives on living with drought rather than dealing with drought. It recognised that drought is a recurring risk that farm businesses need to prepare for, and that support for early intervention is more beneficial than support via response.

The 2015 [Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper](#) set out the Australian Government's roadmap of practical actions to grow the agricultural sector and aimed to help farmers to prepare for drought, not only from a business perspective, but through better social and community support (Commonwealth of Australia 2015). Funding was announced for continued access to initiatives supporting farming businesses and families through hardship, including the Farm Household Allowance and the Rural Financial Counselling Service, access to concessional loans and the Farm Management Deposits Scheme.

In 2018, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) signed the first [National Drought Agreement \(2018\)](#) replacing the 2013 Intergovernmental Agreement on National Drought Program Reform. This

established a joint approach to drought preparedness, response and recovery, with a focus on accountability and transparency. A key objective of the drought agreement was to:

increase the adoption by farming businesses and the farming sector of self-reliant, sustainable and resilient approaches to manage business risks, through improved skills and business decision-making, and the adoption of new knowledge and tools from research and development. (COAG 2018)

The National Drought Agreement (2018) also outlined the roles and responsibilities of the Australian, state and territory governments. This confirmed:

- All parties were responsible for programs and communication, including supporting drought preparedness and building capability, mitigating the effects of drought on the health and wellbeing of farming families and farming communities, and providing rural financial counselling services.
- States and territories were responsible for the delivery and update of capacity building programs to improve farm skills and decision making and ensuring animal welfare and land management issues are managed during drought.
- The Australian Government was responsible for funding for the Farm Household Allowance, ongoing taxation incentives to support farming businesses' risk management, improving drought indicator information, and establishing and operating the Future Drought Fund to enhance nation-wide drought preparedness and resilience.

### 3.3 The Future Drought Fund

The FDF was announced in 2018 and established on 1 September 2019 by the [Future Drought Fund Act 2019](#) (FDF Act). The first public consultations took place from September to December 2019, and the first round of programs were announced on 1 July 2020, when funding became available. The FDF enhances the Australian Government's ability to make arrangements with, and grants to, persons and bodies in relation to drought resilience, preparedness and response. On establishment, the FDF was credited with the balance of the previous Building Australia Fund (Department of Finance 2024). The Australian Government invested an initial \$3.9 billion into the Fund. The earnings from this are reinvested. The Fund is expected to grow to \$5 billion by 2028–29.

As outlined in the FDF Act, the objective of the FDF is to enhance the public good by building drought resilience. The benefits generated by the use of funding must be able to be accessed and shared by many (public benefits), rather than be captured solely by individual businesses or industries for private commercial gain.

The FDF is a significant government investment with \$100 million made available each year for FDF grants and programs to build drought resilience. These investments are to support grants, programs and tools helping farming businesses and communities prepare for drought by building resilience through resources, practices and capabilities.

All funding decisions under the FDF Act, including the design and delivery of programs, must be consistent with the Funding Plan, a legislative instrument, issued by the Drought Minister, that outlines the high-level vision, aim and strategic objectives of the FDF. The Funding Plan is renewed

every 4 years after a period of public consultation. The most recent Funding Plan was released in 2024. The FDFCC, an independent advisory group created under the FDF Act, provides advice to the minister on the Funding Plan. The FDFCC comprises experts in sustainability, drought resilience, economics, climate change, innovation and rural and regional development.

The Regional Investment Corporation (RIC) Board also has a legislated role to provide a check on whether the use of FDF funds is consistent with the Funding Plan. The Drought Minister must request advice from the board before making an arrangement or grant under the FDF Act.

## Drought Resilience Funding Plan

In late 2019, the FDFCC led a public consultation process to develop the Funding Plan (2020–2024).<sup>1</sup> In doing so, the FDFCC travelled across the country to liaise with stakeholders, hold public meetings, and consult with over 690 people to inform development of the Funding Plan. The Funding Plan came into force in February 2020.

The Funding Plan set out an approach for making arrangements or grants in relation to drought resilience under the FDF. It identified 3 interconnected strategic priorities:

- 1) economic resilience for an innovative and profitable agricultural sector
- 2) environmental resilience for sustainable and improved functioning of farming landscapes
- 3) social resilience for resourceful and adaptable communities.

It established 17 principles that applied to grants or arrangements made under the FDF Act. The principles reflected the FDF's policy aims, including a preference for community-led, co-designed and end-user focused approaches. It also included a range of administrative and governance requirements, such as avoiding duplication of existing government programs, and complying with Commonwealth grants guidelines and procurement rules.

The Funding Plan recommended actions to achieve the FDF's strategic priorities. This included sharing knowledge, supporting innovation and extension, encouraging collaboration and building capacity.

Across the first phase of the FDF (2020 to 2024), 19 FDF programs were designed and delivered (see Table 1). These investments were focused on building resilience through better resources, practices and capabilities to enable farmers, agribusinesses, communities and others to make better decisions about how to best manage the risks and impacts of droughts in their context (DAFF 2025c).

**Table 1 FDF programs and funding under the Drought Resilience Funding Plan (2020–2024)**

Theme	Program	Allocated (\$m)
Better climate information	Climate Services for Agriculture	28.9
	Drought Resilience Self-Assessment Tool	10.0
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>38.9</b>
Better planning	Farm Business Resilience program	75.9
	Regional Drought Resilience Planning program	40.8
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>116.7</b>

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Theme	Program	Allocated (\$m)
Better practices	Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs	79.0 <sup>a</sup>
	National Enabling Activities	7.8
	Drought Resilience Innovation Grants	33.9
	NRM Drought Resilience Program - Grants and Landscapes	13.4
	Drought Resilient Soils and Landscape Program	23.1
	Long Term Trials of Drought Resilient Farming Practices	20.0
	Extension and Adoption of Drought Resilience Farming Practices Grants (formerly known as Grants to Support the Adoption of Drought Resilient Practices)	14.2
	Drought Resilience Commercialisation Initiative	10.0
	Drought Resilience Scholarships	1.6
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>203.0</b>
Better prepared communities	Phase 1 – Networks to build drought resilience	23.4
	Phase 1 – Drought Resilience Leaders	17.4
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>40.8</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>399.4</b>

<sup>a</sup> In addition to the \$79 m allocation, the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs had a further \$10 m allocated to them in 2024 under the Funding Plan (2020–2024).

Source: FDF annual report 2023–24

## Current drought policy

Australian drought policy continues to evolve. In 2024, the current National Drought Agreement (2024–2029) was agreed, along with the Australian Government’s Drought Plan (2024–2029), the FDF Drought Resilience Funding Plan (2024–2028), and the Investment Strategy (2024–2028).

## National Drought Agreement

In 2024, the Australian, state and territory governments signed the current National Drought Agreement (2024–2029), replacing the National Drought Agreement (2018). The current drought agreement provides a framework for nationally coordinated and complementary drought policy and programs. It has agreed principles to guide drought preparedness, response and recovery (Commonwealth, states and territories 2024).

All jurisdictions are working towards the high-level goals which are:

- The agricultural sector and rural communities are better prepared for and able to manage the risks associated with drought, climate change and variability, to enhance their long-term productivity, sustainability, well-being, and resilience.
- The agricultural sector and rural communities are appropriately supported in hard times, and know what support is available and how to access to it.
- The agricultural sector, industry service providers, agri-finance, community organisations and all levels of government work together to support drought preparedness, response, and recovery.

The current drought agreement expands on the joint responsibilities of the Australian, state and territory governments compared to the previous drought agreement. This includes:

- collaboration to develop policy and programs to identify intersecting risks and opportunities in responding, recovering and preparing for drought
- provide support to mitigate effects of drought on all health and wellbeing aspects and viability of regional economies
- design, develop and implement drought initiatives noting impacts of drought extend beyond the farm gate and across supply chains
- work with non-party stakeholders to build understanding and share information across the drought cycle
- monitor and evaluate drought policy and program, and make publicly available lessons learned
- share timely regional intelligence to have a national picture of current conditions.

## Australian Government Drought Plan

In 2024, the [Australian Government Drought Plan \(2024–2029\)](#) was released. The Drought Plan outlines the Australian Government’s drought policy, programs and activities that deliver on their responsibilities in the National Drought Agreement (2024–2029). It explains how they support farming businesses and communities to prepare for, manage through and recover from drought.

The Australian Government’s drought policy aims to:

- build the drought resilience of farming businesses by enabling preparedness, risk management and financial self-reliance
- ensure an appropriate safety net is always available to those experiencing hardship
- encourage stakeholders to work together to address the challenges of drought.

The Drought Plan groups the hubs under ‘Promoting innovation and adoption’ and describes the hubs role and activities. The hubs’ role is ‘to connect farmers with regional agricultural experts, innovation and new practices’, and hub activities are ‘designed in collaboration with farmers to meet local drought resilience needs’ (DAFF 2024a). The Drought Plan identifies hubs as an on-ground network embedded in communities that can provide localised and tailored information to them, and inform the government about regional drought conditions and impacts (DAFF 2024a). The Drought Plan also identifies hubs as partners to communities that own and lead drought resilience plans developed under the Regional Drought Resilience Planning program.

## FDF Drought Resilience Funding Plan

In 2024, the Funding Plan (2024–2029) was released. The Funding Plan aims ‘to build drought resilience, including climate resilience for the public good of the Australian agriculture sector, landscapes, and communities’ (DAFF 2025c). It has new elements which include:

- categories of funding principles, one for the Fund and another for each grant and arrangement
- resilience to drought and broader climate impacts



- engagement and collaboration with a diverse range of stakeholders, including First Nations peoples
- robust MEL and reporting.

## FDF Investment Strategy

In 2025, the Investment Strategy was released. The Investment Strategy provides a detailed plan for drought resilience investments under the Fund. It focuses on 5 priority funding areas:

- partnering for local solutions
- partnering for First Nations initiatives
- building knowledge, skills and capability
- innovating for transformation
- measuring progress and knowledge sharing.

The Investment Strategy describes the hub program and funding, and this review. It groups the hub program under 'Partnering for local solutions' and describes hubs as 'providing regionally focused information and support to develop, extend and encourage the adoption of drought resilient technologies and practices' (DAFF 2025a).

It also describes hubs' roles in key areas such as hubs informing coordinated FDF investment and sharing knowledge. The hub program has identified regional priorities and actions that inform potential funding and activities across the FDF. The hubs will continue to support knowledge sharing across FDF programs through knowledge brokers and adoption officers. It also describes the hubs' role hosting Regional Soil Coordinators.

## 3.4 Drought initiatives and responsibilities

### Australian Government support

Drought impacts multiple areas of government policy. It involves collaboration within the Australian Government, as well as between the Australian and state and territory governments. The FDF and its programs, including the hub program, are part of these national arrangements.

Australian Government initiatives outside the FDF provide support and are detailed as following.

- The **Farm Management Deposit Scheme** allows eligible primary producers to set aside pre-tax income during years of high cash-flow, which can be drawn upon when needed, including during drought. Primary producers can also access income tax averaging provisions to even out their income and tax payable from year to year.
- **Farm Household Allowance** provides assistance to farmers and their partners running commercial operations that are experiencing low cash flow. The program is not drought-specific however, drought conditions are the largest single driver of uptake.
- The **Rural Financial Counselling Service** is an ongoing Australian Government Program. It provides free and independent financial counselling to eligible farmers, fishers, foresters, and small related businesses experiencing, or at risk of, financial hardship. The service aims to help

clients out of financial crisis, improve their financial wellbeing and resilience, and improve the profitability of their business or facilitate a dignified exit through sale or succession.

- **Concessional loans** to farming businesses, offered by the RIC, where there are financial needs. These can be used to support on-farm investments in preparing for drought, such as water-efficient infrastructure.
- The **National Agricultural Innovation Policy** launched in September 2020 aimed to reform Australia's agricultural innovation system by strengthening leadership and regions to achieve greater uptake of innovation. This led to an additional \$20 million for hubs to enable them to serve as focal points for drought resilience and other agricultural innovation outcomes.

Related Australian Government investment include:

- Funding for RDCs to invest government and levy-payer funds in diverse research, development and extension projects, including projects on water efficiency, improved crop varieties and grazing management. There are 15 RDCs, of which 5 are Australian Government statutory bodies and 10 are industry-owned companies.
- These 15 RDCs are prominent organisations in the agriculture and resources environment. They allow the Australian Government and primary producers to co-invest in research, development and extension to improve profitability, productivity and competitiveness. RDCs invest funds in both research development and extension projects, including projects on water efficiency, improved crop varieties and grazing management which drives innovation in Australian agriculture. In addition, some hubs received grant funding from RDCs, increasing funding levels and breadth of projects under delivery by hubs.
- The Australian Government provides national coordination and leadership to manage water resources sustainability, and to build preparedness for a range of climate risks, including drought. The [Basin Plan 2012](#) and the [Murray-Darling Agreement](#) work together to prioritise critical water needs in the River Murray system. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority has a regional presence across the basin, with 7 regional offices and a network of regional engagement officers.
- The Australian Government provides leadership on national adaptation reform, developing policies to ensure that action is well-targeted and effective through the [National Climate Risk Assessment](#) and [National Adaptation Plan](#). The [National Statement on Climate Change and Agriculture](#) defines the roles and the states and territories, and the Australian Government, and present a unified vision and a shared commitment by ministers to climate-smart practices.
- The Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) is the Australian Government's key investment platform for natural resource management, sustainable agriculture and environmental protection outcomes. NHT has established the Climate-Smart Agriculture Program, a series of investments that focus on increasing the capacity and capability of the agricultural sector to adopt sustainable and climate-smart agricultural practices. The NHT supports regional delivery partners in 52 regional areas across the country, delivering natural resource management planning, community and First Nations engagement, project design and monitoring.
- Extension and facilitation services are provided through national networks of Regional Soil Coordinators (positioned in hubs) and Sustainable Agriculture Facilitators who connect farmers,

landholders, community groups and the agricultural industry to relevant information and programs on climate-smart, sustainable agricultural practices. The NHT supports regional delivery partners in 52 regional areas across the country, delivering natural resource management planning, community and First Nations engagement, project design and monitoring.

## State and territory governments

State and territory governments support the preparedness, management, response and recovery to drought including by primary producers. The National Drought Agreement (2024–2029) describes state and territory governments' responsibilities (Commonwealth, states and territories 2024). These include:

- administer and coordinate drought policies and programs in their jurisdiction
- engage relevant stakeholders in the design and delivery of policies and programs within their jurisdiction, and across the drought cycle
- support the design and implementation of joint policies and programs, including through co-contribution of state-based FDF initiatives
- manage animal welfare and natural resource issues appropriately during drought in accordance with state and territory legislative responsibilities
- States and territory governments also provide regional and on-ground information through their on-ground networks and support FDF programs such as delivering the Farm Business Resilience Program (DAFF 2024a).

## Private sector

In addition to Australian Government programs, a range of government and private sector service providers exist in regional Australia to deliver research, development, extension and adoption services on drought preparedness, natural resource management, agricultural innovation, agricultural business management, climate adaption and drought resilience and preparedness.

Some services support Australian Government or state and territory programs and initiatives, while others are driven by industry demand and need. Philanthropic and local service providers also have a strong profile in some areas. Many of these service providers have established relationships that had been tested through droughts and other events.

# Overview of the hub program

This chapter explores the development and implementation of the hub program including:

- the background to the hub program
- agreeing the Grant Opportunity Guidelines
- establishment of grant agreements with hub host organisations
- variations to funding and grant agreements over the program's lifetime
- requirements for MEL
- an overview of program governance and departmental support.

## 4.1 Development of the hub program

The hub program's major elements were first proposed in the preliminary 2020 FDF program design. This included initiatives to be delivered through a lead research entity, responsible for connecting research products to extension, adoption and commercialisation activities. A network of drought resilience facilitators was also explored.

The agreed hub program model was one of the first FDF programs to be established. The hub program sought to deliver on elements outlined in the Funding Plan (2020–2024), with various objectives to:

- Support demand driven research including cross-sectoral development, extension and adoption to expand technologies available to primary producers and agribusiness to respond to risks such as drought—both within their current industries and activities and to enable switches to new enterprises.
- Involve end users to co-design local natural resource management research development, extension and adoption. This would help to develop tailored outcomes and the adoption of the research.
- Incentivise local and regional organisation's capabilities by trialling and adopting new natural resource management practices and technology through collaboration.
- Facilitate increased community understanding of their drought resilience, including through training and information sharing—for example, case studies, inventory or support packages and making information readily accessible.
- Support community activities and initiatives that foster ongoing social networking, support, engagement and wellbeing.

## 4.2 Hub grant opportunity guidelines

Upon announcement of the FDF, the hub program formed part of the FDF Drought Resilience Research and Adoption Program, which also included the Drought Resilience Innovation Grants, Drought Resilience Research and Adoption Investment Plan, the Science to Practice Forum and a knowledge platform (DAFF 2024c).

To commence the hub program, in October 2020, the FDF released the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Grant Opportunity Guidelines. These presented a refined version of the program design to promote responses from interested parties (DAWE 2020). The Grant Opportunity Guidelines provided the following information to assist those applying for a grant. Bidders were to:

- develop and implement drought resilience research, development, extension, adoption and commercialisation (RDEA&C) strategies, building on strengths and innovation potential for their region
- conduct co-designed, collaborative and demand-driven RDEA&C
- support participating farmers, supply chain small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and community groups to improve their drought resilience capability, increase productivity and create jobs, through adoption and commercialisation of research and knowledge
- support and strengthen networks and drive collaborative arrangements in their region
- liaise with other hubs and the department about planned activities and outputs, and input into the development of the program's future RDEA&C investment and implementation priorities
- liaise with the department and other hubs to prepare for and present to the Science to Practice Innovation Forum
- develop a detailed co-designed work-plan which is reviewed annually
- establish a physical presence in the hub's region which is relevant to the services delivered.

The grant was open to collaborative, multi-disciplinary and multi-institution/organisation consortia. Each consortium was required to have a lead organisation for the grant application, who would enter into a subsequent grant agreement with the department. The consortium lead had to be an eligible entity: a company, a co-operative, an Indigenous corporation, a local government entity, incorporated association, an incorporated joint venture between a state or territory government agency and a university or other organisation, a registered higher education provider or a trust.

Australian, state and territory government agencies were excluded from applying as the consortium lead. They could, however, be part of a consortium and involved in a hub's activities. Each consortium was required to have at least one regional university as a member. A metropolitan university that demonstrated regional connections qualified as a regional university.

The Grant Opportunity Guidelines specified also that applicants needed to include a:

- high level RDEA&C plan
- business plan outlining their ability to leverage the existing administrative capabilities in the region, plus cash and in-kind co-investment
- risk management plan
- list of members of the proposed consortium.

An independent Selection Advisory Panel (SAP) was appointed to review the grant applications received, and to identify and recommend the 8 successful grant applicants for the defined hub

regions. The SAP also prescribed additional requirements for each hub, which were negotiated by the department upon a final offer being presented to each successful grant applicant.

The subsequent grant agreements set out the relationship between the parties to the agreement and specified the details of the grant. The requirements in the hub grant agreements reflected: the details of each grant application; any additional individual hub requirements; expectation to align and ensure due diligence in reporting; and accountability for delivery including agreeing to standard clauses required for delivery of government grant contracts.

## 4.3 Grant agreements

### Purpose

Through the hub selection process, 8 hubs were selected and individual hub grant agreements were signed to include 4 financial years (2020–21 to 2023–24). These were between the Australian Government, represented by the Drought Minister, and each hub's host organisation. These were signed in June 2021, allowing for 3 full years of funding and delivery by the hubs.

All hubs agreed to common activity requirements for their establishment and reporting. Key activities identified (not an exhaustive list) are detailed in Table 2

Based on the additional requirements prescribed by the SAP, a set of tailored requirements were included in individual hub grant agreements.

**Table 2 Key activity requirements under the signed grant agreements**

Requirement	Grant agreement requirements
Role	As detailed in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines (listed earlier)
Staffing	<p>The appointment of core staff:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Hub Director <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) provide leadership and proactively and effectively engage in the hub activities</li> <li>b) implement the hub's strategic direction and oversees the hub's community engagement, knowledge brokering, communications, administration, MEL and performance reporting</li> <li>c) participates in the hub's governance structure.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2) Knowledge Broker <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) refine and define the questions that need answering by science</li> <li>b) identify key hub actions required to translate science and research, data, outcomes, or outputs into practice</li> <li>c) facilitate connection, and the sharing of information, between the hub and other program hubs and fund programs</li> <li>d) communicate the hub's RDEA&amp;C research, data, outcomes, and outputs that address the region's knowledge priorities and can be easily understood by the Region's relevant stakeholders</li> <li>e) respond to requests from the Drought Minister or department to provide advice and/or information about the activity and</li> <li>f) participate in regular meetings with the department and the Knowledge Brokers from all hubs.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
Subcontracting	The grantee must enter into a legally binding agreement with each subcontractor in the grantee's own name (and not as the Commonwealth's agent) that gives effect to, and is consistent with the, the grantee's obligations under this agreement.

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Requirement	Grant agreement requirements
Subcontracting of Members	Any member of the grantee's consortium who is approved by the Commonwealth under this agreement to assist the grantee perform the activity (Hub Members)
Subcontracting of Networking Partners	Any other third party (Network Partner) who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>receives a grant amount to perform a project, and/or</li> <li>is required to provide any other contributions, or any other in-kind or financial contribution greater than \$30,000, as part of the activity in accordance with this agreement.</li> </ul>
Operational Plan and associated sub plans	The hub's development and implementation of an Operational Plan that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a Communications, Extension and Adoption Strategy</li> <li>a more detailed Activity Work Plan and Budget</li> <li>a Risk Assessment and Management Plan for the Activity</li> </ul>
Reporting Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The development and implementation of a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) plan (MEL Plan)</li> <li>The development of a Data Capture Plan that includes the design of, and data collection arrangements for drought resilience indicators.</li> </ul>
Presence	The hub's provision of a 'shopfront' for RDEA&C support, enabling stakeholders throughout the region to share information and resources, test and access innovative ideas, techniques and technology, and to improve their capabilities and create jobs.
Participation	The hub's active participation in the preparation and delivery of, including presenting at, the Commonwealth's Drought Resilience Science to Practice Forum.
Communications	Specific grant acknowledgement requirements.
Intellectual property and knowledge sharing	The hub is obliged to grant the Commonwealth a permanent royalty-free licence to all material produced through the grant. The hub must also ensure all research, data, outputs and outcomes, including those developed by the hub, members and partners, are made publicly and freely available.
Other Contributions – cash and in-kind	The grantee must provide or obtain other contributions and use them for hub activities in accordance with clause CB1.
Independent audit	The grantee is required to provide an independently audited financial acquittal report showing the grantee's and each hub member's receipt and expenditure of the grant, other contributions and any other activity contributions by the following dates for the following periods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>by 31 August 2022 for the period from the Activity start date to 30 June 2022, and</li> <li>by 31 October 2025 for the period from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2025.</li> </ul>

## 4.4 Funding for hubs

### Initial funding

The initial funding made available for the period 2020–21 to 2023–24 was \$64 million, shared equally across the 8 hubs (DAWE 2020). An additional one-off payment of \$2 million was provided to the University of New England, Armidale Node as part of the Southern Qld Northern NSW grant agreement, raising the assignment of funds on execution of the grant agreements to \$66 million.

In line with best practise government grant processes, funding was paid to grantees across a series of milestones, with an initial \$2 million to each hub in June 2021 and further \$1 million every 6 months based on the department's acceptance of activity reports.

Other contributions to the hub were in the form of financial (cash) or in-kind contributions, in addition to grant funds for each hub. On initiation of the grant program the grant opportunity guidelines set out the minimum requirement for hubs to match the quantum of funding from



government via alternate sources. Each hub indicated in their grant applications how they would seek other contributions and provided specific schedules as an attached table or in an activity budget. Hubs were to confirm the actual contributions they received through the reporting process.

## Core hub funding variations

Over the program's lifetime, several deeds of variation were processed to amend hubs' grant agreements. These provided the hubs with additional FDF funding and set to redefine expectations and additional requirements of hubs. Table 3 summarises the source and amounts paid. As at the time of the evaluation, the total contracted core hub funding allocations to hubs is \$117.1 million. This does not include any in-kind contributions or costs associated with government support for the program.

**Table 3 Total core hub funding provided to hub host organisations, 2020 to 2026**

Fund name	Fund source	Total amount (\$m, GST excl.)	Payments to hubs	Grant variation
Initial funding	FDF Funding Plan (2020–2024)	64	June 2021 October 2021 February 2022 September 2022 April 2023 November 2023 April 2024	Agreement signed June 2021
Southern Qld Northern NSW- University of New England Armidale node	FDF Funding Plan (2020–2024)	2	March 2022	April 2022
Adoption Officers	FDF Funding Plan (2020–2024)	9	May 2022 May 2023 April 2024	April 2022
Cross-hub projects	FDF Funding Plan (2020–2024)	4.1	October 2022	June 2022
Hub 12-month extension to June 2025	FDF Funding Plan (2020–2024)	10	May 2024 November 2024	May 2024
Hub program 2-year extension 2024 to 2026	FDF Funding Plan (2024–2028)	28	On variation execution, October to December 2024 Due March 2025 Due September 2025 Due March 2026	October to December 2024
TOTAL	–	117.1	–	–

A summary of these variations (in same order as Table 3) is shared here:

- \$9 million announced in March 2022 over 3 years as part of the 2021–22 budget to recruit Adoption Officers (\$375,000 per hub, per year). Adoption Officers were intended to work with farmers and their communities to use relevant knowledge and tools to support innovative

drought resilient practices (see section 5.4). Funding for Adoption Officers was formalised in a deed of variation in April 2022.

- \$4.1 million announced in April 2022 for 5 projects to support cross-hub collaboration. These projects were selected through a closed competitive grant round for hubs. There were 7 project applications submitted by the hubs, with successful bids from Northern WA and NT Hub, SA Hub, South-West WA Hub and Vic Hub. The funding was distributed based on the selected projects, so funding was not allocated equally across hubs (Table 4). A one-off payment for cross-hub projects was made to the hubs in October 2022. All hubs participated in one or more cross-hub projects (see Appendix F for full list). Funding for cross-hub projects was formalised in a deed of variation in June 2022.

**Table 4 Cross-hub project funding allocation**

Hub	Funding (\$)	Projects (each project lead is specified)
Northern WA and NT Hub	533,102	Managing Rangelands for Drought Resilience (lead)
		Fast tracking WA and NT to Align with Nutritional Feed Base Mapping Technology at a National Level (lead)
		Modern Soil Moisture Monitoring to Improve Irrigation
SA Hub	789,199	Drought Management for the Health and Longevity of Perennial Horticulture Plants (lead)
		Drought Resilience Practices in Mixed Farming Systems
		Managing Rangelands for Drought Resilience
Southern NSW Hub	433,333	Drought Management for the Health and Longevity of Perennial Horticulture Plants
		Managing Rangelands for Drought Resilience
Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub	183,333	Managing Rangelands for Drought Resilience
South-West WA Hub	713,102	Modern Soil Moisture Monitoring to Improve Irrigation (lead)
		Fast tracking WA and NT to Align with Nutritional Feed Base Mapping Technology at a National Level
		Managing Rangelands for Drought Resilience
Tas Hub	405,969	Drought Management for the Health and Longevity of Perennial Horticulture Plants
		Drought Resilience Practices in Mixed Farming Systems
Tropical North Qld Hub	183,333	Managing Rangelands for Drought Resilience
Vic Hub	855,842	Drought Resilience Practices in Mixed Farming Systems (lead)
		Drought Management for the Health and Longevity of Perennial Horticulture Plants
		Modern Soil Moisture Monitoring to Improve Irrigation

- In October 2023, the government announced it would provide an additional \$10 million in funding to the hub program to extend the hubs through to June 2025 (\$1.25 million per hub) (DAFF 2023). This provided short-term funding for the hubs to continue critical activities, including regional engagement and support. This was formalised in a deed of variation with each hub in May 2024.

- In May 2024, the government announced further funding for the hub program as part of the 2024–25 budget. This included an additional \$28 million for the hubs (\$16 million in 2024–25 and \$12 million in 2025–26) while this review of the hub program was undertaken. The additional funding for 2024–25 and 2025–26 was allocated evenly across hubs, with each hub receiving \$2 million in 2024–25 and a further \$1.5 million in 2025–26. A deed of variation for the additional \$28 million was signed with hubs in November 2024.
- In line with the PC's recommendations 3.1 and 7.4, the Investment Strategy has earmarked a further \$104 million over 6 years from 2026–27, subject to the review findings. No variations have yet been signed.
- Minor variations were made to improve administrative clarity.

## Additional Commonwealth funding

Many hubs have secured additional funding, which is noted in the hub summaries (See [Appendix I](#)).

**Table 5 Additional Commonwealth funding provided to hub host organisations, 2020 to 2026**

Fund name	Fund source	Total amount (\$m, GST Excl.)	Payments to hubs	Grant variation
Agriculture Innovation grants	National Agriculture Innovation Agenda	20	July 2022 August 2022 November 2022 May 2023	Agreement signed April 2022
Regional Soil Coordinators to January 2024	Natural Heritage Trust Smart Farms Building Landcare, Community and Capacity	3	February 2022 February 2023	Not applicable
Regional Soil Coordinators interim funding (4 hub hosts only) to June 2024	Natural Heritage Trust Capacity Building Climate smart, sustainable agriculture	0.312	February 2024	February 2024
Regional Soil Coordinators July 2024 to June 2028	Natural Heritage Trust Capacity Building Climate smart, sustainable agriculture	5.9	July 2024 Due August 2025 Due August 2026 Due August 2027	Not applicable
<b>TOTAL</b>	–	29.2	–	–

The details regarding the variations (in same order as Table 5) is outlined here:

- \$20 million in October 2021 to expand the hubs' focus to include broader agricultural innovation outcomes, under the National Agricultural Innovation Agenda. Each hub signed a separate contract with the Commonwealth and received \$2.5 million over 2 years in additional, non-FDF, funding. Innovation grant funding to the hubs ceased in May 2023 and hub activities under this funding ended by April 2024, once projects had been completed.

- \$3 million in January 2022 from the Natural Heritage Trust's Building Landcare Community and Capacity program (BLCC) to establish Regional Soil Coordinator (RSC) roles within each hub (initially \$375,000 per hub for 2 years). Funding aimed for RSCs to assist farmers to understand their soil and make better management decisions. Each host organisation executed variations to extend their Activity Completion Date and Agreement End Date from 31 January 2024 and 26 April 2024 to 30 June 2024 and 30 August 2024 respectively; with four hubs also receiving a total of \$312,115 (GST Excl.) of additional funds from a different funding source.
- As part of the 2023–24 budget, \$6.26 million in funding was allocated for the continuation of Regional Soil Coordinators.
- \$312,115 of the \$6.26 million was provided as interim funding to 4 of the 8 host organisations who requested to extend their grant agreements until June 2024. This was to ensure funding continued and personnel could be retained. The University of Tasmania, Charles Sturt University, and Charles Darwin University received \$80,000 each and the Grower Group Alliance received \$72,115.
- In July 2024, the remaining \$5.948 million was allocated to all 8 hubs under a new grant agreement with NHT, to fund RSCs from July 2024 to June 2028. Each hub received \$743,485 in funding to be paid over 4 years.

## 4.5 Program governance

The 2 main hub program governance bodies are the FDFCC and the HAC, which was established in May 2021. The FDFCC generally receives updates on the status of the hub program at its regular FDFCC meetings, but the HAC engages more frequently and in-depth with hubs.

Since 2022, FDFCC and HAC have held an annual joint meeting, with the agenda providing one on one time with Hub Directors to provide an update to committee members on their hub's progress and challenges. FDFCC and HAC then provide feedback to each hub following these meetings, including ideas to address hub-specific concerns, where relevant. This feedback was provided verbally in 2023 and in written form in 2024.

The HAC is an independent advisory committee which aims to support the alignment of the hubs with national priorities and strategic objectives. HAC provides advice to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and the department on the hubs and their activities. From 2021 to 2023, HAC provided written reports to the minister after each HAC meeting, sharing their observations.

In its original conception, the HAC had 5 or 6 members, with at least 2 candidates drawn from the FDFCC. To assist in managing conflicts of interest, members of the HAC were not to be involved in the leadership or governance of a hub. As the members of the SAP had gained knowledge of each hubs through its role in selecting the host organisation, several of SAP members were appointed to the first HAC.

Throughout 2021 and 2022, the HAC took an active role in assisting the set up and strategic direction of the hubs. The HAC held 6 meetings in 2021 and 8 meetings in 2022.

Where COVID-19 restrictions allowed, the HAC met monthly with intended travel to a hub every second meeting. Due to both COVID-19 disruptions and funding restrictions, the HAC were only able

to visit 4 hubs during this period. In 2023, departmental budget restrictions led to a decision to stop the HAC travelling to hubs. The HAC meetings were reduced in scale to take place on a quarterly basis. The department revised the HAC meeting structure, including virtual presentations from hub directors. Some travel by the HAC recommenced in 2024.

The HAC's terms of reference were revised in July 2024 to recognise the new committee's appointment for one year, until 30 June 2025 (see terms of reference at [Appendix G](#)). A future HAC beyond 30 June 2025 is dependent on the findings of this review. Under the current terms of reference, the HAC is required to write to the minister to advise on progress and significant issues only, as appropriate.

## 4.6 Departmental management and support

The hub program is managed within the FDF Innovation and Adoption Branch. This is one of 4 branches within the Farm Resilience Division and is overseen by a Principal Director. The main team providing program management and support is the hubs management team. The governance and committee secretariat team also supports the FDFCC, HAC and Hub Directors Steering Committee. Staff across the FDF branches manage communities of practice for the hub program.

### Senior staff

The Principal Director manages the FDF Innovation and Adoption Branch and has responsibility for 5 sections, including the hub management team.

The Principal Director has operational oversight of the hub program, and where appropriate, participates in meetings directly with hubs. The Principal Director does not hold financial delegations for hub activities, but is involved in the management of hub performance, including writing letters of concern to the hubs where needed.

The Assistant Secretary of the FDF Strategy and Delivery Branch manages the remaining sections of the FDF, including the governance and committee secretariat team. The Assistant Secretary holds many of the financial delegations for the FDF, such as approving milestone payments to hubs on advice from the hub management team, plus grant variations. The Assistant Secretary also oversees requests for advice from the RIC Board on whether the proposed use of FDF funds (including funding for the hubs) is consistent with the Funding Plan.

### Hub management team

The hub management team is the department's policy lead for the hub program. Key tasks led by the hub management team include:

- reviewing hubs' progress reports against the grant agreement reporting requirements, including follow-up with hubs to clarify issues
- processing milestone payments, once approved
- providing information to the HAC on hubs' progress reporting
- responding to queries from the hubs
- providing information to and from the hubs

- managing funding allocations and monitoring cross-hub projects
- drafting contract variations (when required)
- preparing letters of concern to hubs that are not meeting expectations
- preparing and providing briefings to FDF and departmental executive and the minister of hub activities, including input into the PC Inquiry.

More recently, within the hub management team, selected team members have been allocated responsibility for overseeing 2 to 3 hubs, as well as a program stream, such as MEL. In this role, team members conduct regular engagement with the hubs, including monthly one-on-one meetings and, in some cases, attend as an observer at hub's board or steering committee meetings.

## **FDF governance and committee secretariat team**

The FDF governance and committee secretariat team facilitates the FDFCC, HAC, and Hub Directors Steering Committee meetings, including drafting agendas and coordinating briefings and papers for each meeting. The team also coordinates travel arrangements for committee members, where needed. The secretariat team organises the annual joint meeting of the HAC and FDFCC, and organises appointments, through the Minister and Prime Minister, of new committee members for the FDFCC and HAC.

Following HAC and FDFCC meetings, FDF secretariat team drafts meeting minutes and, for the annual joint HAC and FDFCC meeting, supports the preparation of letters to hubs. The secretariat also drafts correspondence to the minister, where appropriate. This material is approved by the Principal Director (for HAC reporting) or the Assistant Secretary (for FDFCC reporting).

## **Hub Directors Steering Committee**

The Hub Directors Steering Committee commenced in July 2021. The membership consists of the Principal Director (Chair), FDF Innovation and Adoption Branch, and each of the 8 hub directors. The role of the committee is to support the establishment and implementation of the hubs' strategic and operational requirements (see terms of reference at [Appendix H](#)). It provides an opportunity for the hubs to come together to discuss relevant topics, such as common challenges, FDF updates and grant programs, contract variations, or how to work collaboratively.

Initially, the department organised monthly meetings and provided secretariat support. In mid 2023, the meetings organised by the department were reduced to every 2 months, due to departmental resource constraints. Since this time, hub directors have met fortnightly, and these meetings are not attended by the department. Since mid-2021, hub directors also meet annually in-person at a national hub director's meeting to undertake strategic planning for the national hubs network and any other areas for discussion.

## **Communities of Practice**

Communities of practice (COPs) have been established across hubs to support the program's implementation, covering some specific roles that hubs play as well as topics relevant to all hubs. Current COPs include:

- Knowledge Brokers

- Operational Managers
- communications
- MEL and reporting.

All 4 COPs were originally facilitated by the department to allow hub staff across the program to connect, share insights and knowledge, and to address arising challenges. An Adoption Officer COP was initiated by South-West WA hub for all hub participation. FDF staff recently started attending this COP.

The department continues to lead monthly Knowledge Broker and MEL COPs. The COP for Operational Managers are held on an as needs basis and have not met since early 2024, and the communications COP is now led by the hubs' communications staff and occurs monthly. All hubs participate in these COPs.



# Role of hubs

## 5.1 Overview

This chapter reflects on the different roles that hubs have sought to play, including challenges encountered during the early implementation period and the resultant issues they have faced in achieving role clarity. It explores the various activities that hubs have pursued since establishment. The main roles played by hubs, as summarised as following, are frequently overlapping and often mutually reinforcing. Hubs have variously been involved in:

- RDEA&C
- engagement with other organisations
- projects, including cross-hub projects
- communications and information sharing
- other FDF programs
- supporting funding applications
- capability building
- in-drought support
- First Nations
- working with producers

## 5.2 Early implementation period

**Finding 1:** The hub program was launched as an early part of the FDF. Hubs scaled up more rapidly than they could realistically manage in the absence of clarity on purpose and functions. They were expected in their first year to establish their hub models, recruit teams, formalise partnerships, co-design priorities, complete monitoring, evaluation and learning plans, administer significant additional non-hub funding, and commence hub projects, while also negotiating COVID-19 restrictions in many locations.

**Finding 2:** There were no program guidelines in place from commencement, or since, to steer the work of the hubs, leading to vastly different approaches to all aspects of their strategy, operations and functions. Unresolved role clarity has had lasting effects on hubs and across the hub program.

The introduction of the hub program was considered by most stakeholders to be rushed and somewhat chaotic, with grant agreements signed and the first payments made to hubs in June 2021. The commencement of hubs coincided with COVID-19 outbreaks in many regions, impacting various aspects of the rollout, including travel during the expected co-design phase. Further to this, Australia was experiencing La Niña conditions which meant there were some regions experiencing significant rainfall and floods while the drought hubs were being established.

Essentially, within their first year, hubs were expected to have: agreed and stood up their service models; recruited required staff for the core hub and within partner organisations; signed

subcontracts with their partners (some as regional nodes); established workable governance structures; delivered community co-design processes and used these to set priorities; introduced a MEL framework; and commenced allocation and spending of hub funds on projects and related engagement activities. This scale of activity was unrealistic to do well, caused significant stress among hubs and, for some hubs, enshrined the way they worked in a way that served to reduce their agility over the following years.

Despite an already large scope of work, it was also notable that shortly after commencing, hubs took on the following additional activities, increasing their scale and scope:

- within a year, hubs were provided with an additional \$9 million in funds over 3 years (combined) to engage Adoption Officers, who were tasked with facilitating extension and adoption activities across their regions
- in 2022, additional funding of \$4.1 million was allocated from the FDF for five cross hub projects, involving all hubs either in lead or support roles, and
- hubs were granted additional funds from outside the FDF. For example, hubs were engaged to support the National Innovation Agenda (\$20 million to June 2023 across hubs combined) and have hosted soil management coordinators (\$3 million to January 2024 combined, with funding extended to 2028).

For the hub program as a whole, the policy and program development work that would normally precede the creation of a new program of this magnitude was insufficient to guide hubs. For example, there were no program guidelines introduced, and this remains the case. In lieu of an overarching program guideline document, the hubs and FDF management team have defaulted to the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, grant agreement and approved operational plans to guide the strategic and operational interpretation for activities and compliance. Sequential advice provided from HAC and the department during the implementation and establishment of the hubs has not been captured in a single guidance document.

Hubs established themselves based on assumptions about the high-level functions and objectives they should pursue, drawing on their original grant applications and subsequent grant agreements. There was no further depth of information forthcoming about their roles to promote cross-hub consistency.

The review panel identified that hubs have done all they can under difficult circumstances to establish themselves and commence promoting drought resilience. The high degree of flexibility afforded within the model has meant that some hubs have been able to find suitable resolutions to difficult role and prioritisation questions, but across the program, this has not been to a level that would be expected of a program of this size and reach.

## Transformational change

There were practical limitations to how much hubs could achieve or how effectively they could deliver on significant and growing early expectations. Throughout the hub model, there have also been concerns about the gap between each hub's activities and the expectation that they would be able to facilitate 'transformational change', as outlined in the grant agreements:

The Program outcomes are the establishment of eight regionally-focused Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs (Hubs) covering major climatic and agricultural zones across Australia that facilitate transformational change through co-design of RDEA&C activities by bringing together relevant stakeholders to enable user-centred innovation, research and adoption. (DAFF 2021)

A key aspect of drought resilience is the ability to adapt, reorganise or transform in response to changing temperature and rainfall. Taken as a whole, it is intended that FDF programs should include opportunities for incremental, transitional and transformational change under the Funding Plan (2024–2028).

Transformational changes involve system-wide variations that reduce vulnerability to climate and drought risks. The PC explains that projects delivering transformational change require a particular approach to building resilience, including longer term funding, greater risk and costs; for example multiple years under varied seasonal projection cycles (PC 2023).

While many hubs described a focus on the idea of transformational change, available resources, short term funding commitments and multiple areas of hub focus has made it challenging for them to invest in transformational projects. In practice, most hubs seem to be deliver smaller projects targeting on incremental or transitional change.

Across the whole program, while logistical and operational matters were managed as well as possible by each hub, the legacy of more important unresolved issues relating to their core role continues to affect hubs and hub program. These were identified in the PC 2023 report and are a major focus of this report.

### 5.3 Role clarity

**Finding 3:** Hubs were offered a broad remit and high degree of flexibility, so have chosen how and what they focus on under their grant agreements to support drought resilience across their regions. While hubs generally found this empowering, there were tensions for the hubs over time to understand whether the things they had prioritised were in line with expectations of the Australian Government.

**Finding 4:** The lack of clarity about roles led to inefficiencies across the hub program, requiring each hub to individually determine their strategic direction, what to prioritise, who to work with, what approach to take, how to monitor and report on delivery, and how to engage effectively across multiple sectors and stakeholders. A range of quite different approaches have emerged.

**Finding 5:** Hubs have been unable to effectively support all facets of their role, as outlined in their grant agreements. Hubs have been left to make pragmatic decisions about what they should prioritise and how they should operate, which was largely desirable and should now be endorsed.

**Finding 6:** Hubs recognise drought as one of several risks that may impact businesses and communities. Drought was therefore generally viewed by hubs as a subset of broader climate variability and risk, which hubs and their stakeholders widely supported as a more suitable orientation for the work of the hubs.

During the early years of the program, the Australian Government allowed the hubs to define their own work programs, under the broad remit of their grant agreements. A large suite of priorities have been pursued, with limited guidance across the hub program about which areas or activities would

be valuable to focus on. In essence, Australian Government funding was shared with hubs in good faith, on the expectation that hubs would use this sensibly and in ways that would be valuable to producers who may encounter drought challenges on the ground.

There have been efforts to realign the hubs. For example, in April 2022, the Hon David Littleproud MP, Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management, wrote to each Hub Director to clarify the hub's objectives. The Minister stated his view that hubs should be 'enduring institutions that cement relationships between researchers and farmers'. Further, the Minister's vision for hubs was described:

It is my goal for the Hubs to become an integral part of the agricultural innovation system. I want to see the Hubs bridge the critical interface between our world class researchers and our farmers. We look to the Hubs to facilitate the adoption of practices that build drought resilience and support productivity across the agricultural landscape.

In providing such guidance, the Minister emphasised the key innovation and adoption roles that should be played by hubs, but did not also suggest that other aspects of RDEA&C in hub grant agreements were no longer relevant. Hubs continued to define their work programs and project priorities as they saw fit, and the role of hubs in grant agreements were not updated.

Many hubs found the high degree of flexibility rewarding and empowering for their regions, with hub funding able to be used for projects and activities that may not otherwise have occurred. However, there were clear tensions for hubs to gauge whether they were doing the types of things that the Australian Government intended with the funds provided. Hubs felt that they had sought greater clarity over time from various avenues, including the HAC, but guidance had not been readily forthcoming or sufficiently detailed to settle their prioritisation processes.

The review panel heard strongly from hubs that a one-size-fits-all approach across the country would not be appropriate for this program. Hubs feel they have been able to be responsive in defining how they can best offer support within their regional contexts.

By contrast, some non-hub stakeholders shared their lack of clarity about the role being played by hubs. For a number of external parties, there was uncertainty about what the hub was focusing on, how the hub conducted its operations, which organisations were included in the hub's work, who was doing what, and which sectors hubs had chosen to support. Various stakeholders and sectors felt they had not been prioritised by hubs in their regions, despite facing significant drought-related challenges.

Across the hub program as a whole, the diversity of priorities has been a major oversight challenge. It has limited the department's ability to support and guide the program as coherent whole, to effectively support the wide diversity of activities underway, or to consistently monitor achievements across the program. It has made it more difficult to hold hubs accountable for activities that they hubs have chosen to pursue.

A further result has been a degree of inefficiency, with each hub needing to spend time and effort working out its strategy, priorities and approach. As new organisations, hubs have had to understand local opportunities, determine priorities to pursue, establish diverse teams across various existing

organisations, set up and run governance structures, manage selection and delivery of projects, and complete monitoring and related reporting. Each of these facets has taken time to plan, develop, deliver and align.

Furthermore, hubs and stakeholders consulted as part of the review also felt universally that drought was one of several on-farm risks to businesses and communities. Drought had different meanings and resonance in different places, so most hubs have come to view drought as a subset of broader climate variability and risk, which was considered a more suitable orientation for the work undertaken by hubs. This did not drastically alter their role, but impacted on the way many hubs and stakeholders viewed these new bodies.

## 5.4 RDEA&C

**Finding 7:** Some hubs were involved in research and development activities. In most cases, this involved relatively small-scale projects and applied research, rather than larger-scale research processes. This has not generally been considered a strong capacity for the hubs given their resourcing.

**Finding 8:** Hubs have focused on regional extension and adoption to build regional resilience to on-farm risks. This knowledge translation and information sharing role was seen by many, but not all, stakeholders as filling a gap in services and was generally welcomed as the most valid role for hubs to play. However, this varied by region, with each hub needing to define its activities and focus among existing services and supports.

**Finding 9:** Many stakeholders expressed concerns that universities were not best placed to lead extension and adoption services, so hubs have often worked through partners with on-ground networks to lead these services.

**Finding 10:** Upon receipt of additional funding and grants, the role of hubs expanded to include agricultural innovation activities. As this funding was time-limited, hubs' focus in this area has not been sustained at a meaningful scale, although the take up of new technology and knowledge through extension is an important source of innovation at the enterprise level.

**Finding 11:** Hubs have played a limited role in commercialisation activity, with most hubs suggesting that this work was not a high priority for farmers on the ground in the drought resilience context. This objective assumed that hubs would be more engaged in research and intellectual property generation than has occurred in practice.

## Research and development

Hub grant agreements suggested that collaborative RDEA&C was a key role for hubs. Involvement in such activities lies at the heart of the hub program model, and was critical to the program design, which sought to bring together universities and diverse government and sector partners to collaborate for improved drought resilience.

Most hubs undertook some form of research and development, but given funding constraints, this tended to be through relatively small-scale projects tackling various regional priorities. Hubs with multiple universities involved, or that were able to attract associated grants for research, tended to be more deeply involved in research and development activities.

However, it was generally clear that based on their core funding, hubs were not able to undertake research at large scale, when considered in comparison to the collective efforts across the broader

research and development system, involving the Australian Government, state and territory governments, universities, RDCs, Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs) and the private sector.

The 2022 letter from the Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management expressed the ways that the Australian Government's other major investments in research and development could link with the work of the hubs, as follows:

The rural Research and Development Corporations are the cornerstone of the agricultural innovation system with an annual investment of approximately \$800 million in R&D and marketing – approximately \$300 million of this was matching funding from the Australian Government for R&D. The RDCs will be an important partner, and I have asked the RDCs to proactively partner with you to put their R&D through the Hubs, as your connections with farmers will ensure the extension and adoption pathway for this research is relevant to and for the end users – the farmers.

This suggests that, although hubs are primarily led by universities, and the grant agreement was explicit for hubs to not conduct their own fundamental research, the expectation was to proactively partner with leading research bodies and to share research outcomes with their wider networks and reach on-ground with farmers. The review panel found however that the suggested connection to research conducted by RDCs did not appear to have been achieved to the depth envisaged in the excerpt above. While each of the 8 hubs had engaged with RDCs to some extent, intellectual property provisions within hubs' funding agreements, which grant the Australian Government a royalty-free licence and require all project material to be freely available, may have hampered opportunities for hub collaboration and partnerships with RDCs.

Hubs have collaborated in other ways, including with Agrifutures Australia's Innovation Brokers program, and via engagement with Meat & Livestock Australia and the Grains Research and Development Corporation (CRRDC 2024). Some hubs felt that collaboration with RDCs has been challenging due to uncertainty regarding the purpose and role of hubs.

The Council of RDCs reported that hubs had created opportunities for RDCs to co-invest in drought resilience, and to collaborate and leverage skills, expertise and funding to accelerate impacts for producers (CRRDC 2024). This submission stated that:

Hubs have provided the opportunity for some RDCs to expand their reach into regions where they do not have a strong presence of established grower groups or producer networks. Agrifutures have found engagement with Hubs from this perspective particularly valuable given their across-sector remit. Leveraging the Hubs has provided valuable local and regional insights. (CRRDC 2024)

It was generally felt via interviews with non-hub stakeholders that hubs were not best placed to lead in-depth research processes, as they lacked the staff, funding and time to do so. Instead, their main point of value was to translate and share information from various sources with those who could benefit most from it. This extension and adoption role is discussed further as following.

## Extension and adoption

Most hubs and other stakeholders felt that a key service stream for hubs was to share practices and information via extension and adoption activities. This was seen as a natural role for hubs given their multi-disciplinary teams and building on the connections formed with their partners, while leveraging networks across the hub.

This role was reinforced in the model in 2022 when the department provided hubs with additional FDF funds for Adoption Officers (see [section 4.4](#)). The role of these staff as specified in the grant agreement was:

- Driving uptake of new innovations on-farm/at local level for improved drought resilience, including guiding farmers to relevant knowledge, helping translate that knowledge into on-farm adoption and by explaining the benefits of innovation.
- Providing feedback to the regional hub about drought resilience needs and successful approaches in their region.
- Helping identify and engage individuals and hard to reach cohorts who could benefit from the services and support that could be provided by the hubs.
- Potentially assisting in developing and facilitating appropriate networks among Research and Development providers and industry with the goal of supporting development of regionally coordinated approaches to extension and adoption.
- Disseminating information about the FDF to relevant parties through a range of mediums (e.g. social media, face-to-face events, podcasts).
- Supporting farmers to use the tools developed through the Future Drought Fund (e.g. use DRSAT, undertake Farm Business Resilience training).

In practice, Adoption Officers worked with Knowledge Brokers on extension and adoption functions. Other support for these services were provided by partner organisations, including shared hosting of forums with producers and other parties.

A number of stakeholders expressed their view that universities were not the most appropriate institutions to lead drought resilience extension and adoption services. The review panel regularly heard that universities lacked the skills and experience to play this role. The review panel observed that hubs based at universities tended to address this concern by working with partner organisations to lead on-ground extension and adoption efforts.

In some jurisdictions, stakeholders felt that extension and adoption services were a major gap in their R&D systems, with little action to translate research into on-farm action and practice change (Farmers for Climate Action 2024). These gaps had resulted from reductions in state and RDC involvement in extension and adoption over prior decades. Some examples of the extension and adoption role played by hubs are shared as following.

The **Council of RDCs** suggested that the hubs' focus on adoption was 'beneficial to the overall effort to increase adoption around drought resilience and preparedness in regional Australia. This includes some Hubs delivering forums and awareness events to make producers more aware of the tools and resources which are available.' (CRRDC 2024)



The **SA Hub** applied resources to filling gaps left by a decline in regional community and livestock producer research, adoption and extension activities. Regular cuts to funding and services for the Department of Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA) and changes in RDCs programs have been the main drivers of this decline in South Australia. The coordinated efforts of the SA Hub empowered local communities to address priority challenges in a way that would not have been possible otherwise. (Livestock SA 2024)

The **Southern NSW Hub** focused on supporting and enabling adoption of R&D investment outcomes as its primary means of building drought resilience. It sought to create an environment conducive to adoption by fostering collaboration and sharing of resources, developing the skills and tools necessary for extension people and organisations to be more effective in supporting farmers and communities to implement new ideas and technologies, and attracting new investment from federal, state, RDCs and industry for programs delivered on the ground by existing actors in Southern NSW, to support adoption of new and existing R&D outputs. (CSU 2024)

Though not widespread across all RDCs or all hubs, there was some evidence of some hubs working with RDCs to establish their role in the agriculture innovation network. For example, AgriFutures has engaged with several hubs on cross sectorial issues focused on agrifood innovation and technology. This includes funding Innovation Broker positions in Tasmania, South-West Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria (Innovation Brokerage Services Pilot Program) since 2022. Agrifutures is currently in the process of contracting a further collaborative project in Southern Australia (CRRDC 2024).

The review panel heard that in some regions, the introduction of the hubs and offer of extension services had created competition or impacted adversely on existing organisations doing similar work. For example, there were instances identified where hubs ran workshops and events that clashed with other industry events, or offered workshops and programs at no cost, undermining other service providers, who offered similar services for a fee. The review panel also heard critiques that some hub-run events did not appropriately target their audience or provide additional information that added value to farmers (NFF 2024).

In some jurisdictions, stakeholders expressed that hubs did not need to play a strong extension and adoption role and lacked the scale to cover multiple regions and sectors adequately. In these areas, stakeholders suggested that hubs could be duplicative of existing organisations, including agriculture departments, NRM Regions, RDCs, CRCs, private agronomists or Local Land Services. In all locations, hubs needed to find an accepted place among existing services and supports, and this differed by region.

## Agricultural innovation

Innovation as a concept is closely linked to adoption and extension. The World Bank describes innovation as ‘the ability to introduce a new product, a new idea, a new technology or a new solution’ (Cirera et al. 2020). While innovation is included in the official hub program name (Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs), a specific innovation-related objective was not included in the grant agreement.

Several hubs identified that they aimed to enable or build innovation pathways. Stakeholders noted that farmers needed access to innovations to improve their drought preparedness and long-term



success. Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub's co-design process led to the hub focusing on innovation extension, adoption of knowledge and change of practice information. Similarly, SA Hub partner Livestock SA described the SA Hub as promoting innovation in farm resilience through the adoption of proven practices or the development of new technologies.

Many hub hosts and partners supported the hubs' innovation role by accessing FDF Drought Resilience Innovation grant funds. These were for specific projects to help Australian farmers, and agricultural-dependent communities and businesses, adopt innovative approaches and technologies to improve drought resilience.

The additional \$2.5 million made available to each hub in 2022 and 2023 through the National Agricultural Innovation Agenda appeared to have influenced the focus and activities of the hubs in relation to innovation (see [section 5.4](#)). This grant funding was managed under a separate contract to the hubs' grant agreements. The hubs were required to develop separate work plans, and later separate milestone reports. As noted by the Vic hub in their submission to the PC Inquiry, this additional grant expanded the hubs' remit to broader agriculture innovation.

However, once the National Agricultural Innovation Agenda grant lapsed, funding to support hubs' involvement in broader agricultural innovation also largely ceased. Many of the Agriculture Innovation projects focusing on priorities other than climate resilience were no longer aligned with the hubs' other priorities. This served to interrupt some of the hub's established relationships and partnerships, for example, with Wine Australia on biosecurity innovation and the Agrifutures innovation brokers positions. Despite Agriculture Innovation Funding ceasing, the department's website still identifies that the hubs have a role in broader agricultural innovation (DAFF 2024c).

The hubs' dual role in delivering innovation for drought resilience and agriculture innovation has caused some confusion for stakeholders and the hubs management team. This confusion was evident through hub activity reporting, staffing roles and responsibilities and branding.

## Commercialisation

Whilst some hubs (SA Hub, Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub, Tropical North Qld Hub, Vic Hub) undertook projects with commercialisation aspects, it had not been a key role, or high priority, for most hubs. Where it has been included, it tended to form part of a project, rather than being a core focus for day-to-day hub operations. Many hubs had not undertaken any commercialisation projects and felt it did not align well with the hub program model, with a focus on sharing, rather protecting, intellectual property.

## 5.5 Engagement

**Finding 12:** The review panel found that hubs are generally working in a collaborative way with a broad range of partner organisations, generally fostering goodwill and supportive relationships to identify and support local priorities. Most hubs have been able to mature and strengthen their relationships with partners over time, however some hubs have not been able to maintain cohesion among their partners.

**Finding 13:** The tensions encountered by hubs working with partners have included: achieving regional cross-sectoral coverage; managing partners' contributions and performance; having the flexibility to adapt

arrangements beyond those that were initially put in place; and offering opportunities for new partners to join the hub over time.

**Finding 14:** The formation of strong collaborative relationships with state and territory governments was crucial for hubs to define and manage their work programs. Some hubs were tightly embedded with their state and territory governments, others operated largely in parallel with limited connection.

The review panel heard from hubs that one of their greatest impacts was to link up various sector stakeholders to work collaboratively across different hub regions. This was encouraged through the hub program design, which encouraged bids from consortia. This had the effect of promoting collaboration from the start, facilitated by hub host organisations. Though intangible, the in-built cooperative structure in the model limited the opportunity for hubs to work in silos and promoted wide and regular engagement with various stakeholders across their regions.

As new organisations, hubs recognised that they needed to develop effective working relationships with different organisations to be successful, including among different producer groups on the ground. The involvement of partners, sometimes via node arrangements, was important for many hubs to extend their reach across different sub-regions.

Done well, sector engagement activity was critical to link disparate organisations to work more collaboratively. Over the early phases of the hub program, hubs needed to:

- identify and contract partners
- co-design priorities
- work collaboratively on regional projects and
- work through partners to leverage participation in hub activities.

All hubs landed in mature stakeholder environments, involving long-standing players, including state and territory governments, NRMs, RDCs, private advisors and parties involved in other FDF programs. There were also numerous producer and land representative bodies, with on-ground connections. Hubs expressed to the review panel that they felt in the early phases that they needed to tread carefully to avoid duplicating existing roles, establishing themselves as collaborators who could uplift regional activities.

Hubs have faced challenges in making this happen but are better placed now than in the early years of the hub program.

Some of the challenges that hubs have encountered include:

- subcontracting sometimes large numbers of different organisations, including defining funded and in-kind contributions, and delivering on or adapting these agreements over time
- achieving equitable regional and sectoral coverage via partners
- maintaining partner goodwill, via involvement in hub staffing or projects
- managing contributions of partners, including those who may not be performing to expectations
- offering opportunities to new partners to join the partner network to support the hub

- communicating and working effectively across often large numbers of partners, each with their own organisational priorities and work programs
- collaborating with partners, rather than competing, particularly in relation to grant opportunities
- agreeing how partners would be involved in governance arrangements
- clearly defining roles and responsibilities, including how to best support producers on the ground
- measuring and monitoring the results of work completed.

Generally, the review panel corroborates the PC review's finding that hubs are fostering genuine regional collaboration. However, there were examples in some hubs of challenging partner relationships that had emerged, and one hub that had lost cohesion among many of its partners, with a lack of clarity on strategy, decision-making and the role that partners could play.

State and territory governments were a critical stakeholder for hubs. All hubs formally linked with their state and territory governments through their partnership arrangements. Many states and territories were participants or observers on hub governance groups.

Some hubs are very tightly embedded in the way they work with their state and territory governments, with joint decision-making and shared financial and staffing contributions. Others were not as strongly linked, and the review observed that in these cases it was difficult for government agencies to engage with the hub, to understand the program's purpose, or identify how the hub could add value to the operational environment. Where there are two hubs within a jurisdiction it can be more challenging for the relevant state agency to maintain strong, consistent links with the hub program.

Engagement with state and territory governments was crucial to manage areas of duplication between the services provided by hubs and those led by state and territory governments, including other FDF programs. However, despite the obvious benefits to such close collaboration, some stakeholders felt that a close relationship with state and territory governments could compromise the overall independence and agency of hubs, depending on the depth of involvement in decision-making and/or delivery of hub projects. This extended to hubs carefully managing the roles they played, relative to state and territory government responsibilities.

## 5.6 Projects

**Finding 15:** A further role for hubs has been to invest in projects to advance knowledge or practice across their regions. These covered various topics and provided a way for hubs to work with their partners and producers on regional priorities.

**Finding 16:** Each hub has had to make judgements about how to allocate their budget between staffing and projects. Most hubs have sought to achieve a balance of both, but some hubs have heavily prioritised investment in their hub staff, with minimal funding applied to projects. This does not appear to be an optimal way for hubs to achieve impact or partner engagement.

**Finding 17:** Cross-hub projects were generally seen as successful and worthwhile, but were limited in their size, scope and duration, with only 5 projects completed. No program arrangements were put in place to continue these projects beyond expiry of the FDF cross-hub funding despite their apparent success.

## Priority-setting

Under their grant agreements, hubs were expected to co-design a set of regional priorities, based on partner and community engagement. This co-design process led to a number of defined activities (areas of focus) for each hub to pursue, which were detailed in hubs' Activity Work Plans. On average, hubs identified between 5 to 8 activities. One hub (Southern Qld Northern NSW hub) identified 14 activities.

These activities variously included administrative tasks, plus related functions to run the hub, such as governance, communications and MEL. They also often included activities that were aligned to broader high-level themes, such as First Nations engagement, innovation, collaboration, and extension and adoption.

Hubs were able to action these activities via selected projects. There was no clear definition of a 'project' in the grant agreement, so hubs were able to shape and select their projects in a way that they felt would best support their activities.

## Project selection

In practice, there were different models for selecting projects. Most commonly, hub boards made decisions about which projects to fund, following a process of review and assessment. Some hubs ran centralised project review processes, in some cases by inviting submissions from hub partners and selecting projects to receive funding (akin to a grants process).

Other hubs chose instead to share funds directly with selected partners (e.g. regional nodes), who were then free to define and select projects as they saw fit to support their sub-regions. In one case, this led to a partner running a small grant process.

Most hubs commenced projects by varying the funding allocation to existing partners via subcontracts. Under their subcontracts, some partners were enabled by hubs to engage additional parties to support for project delivery, while other hubs disallowed this practice.

All hubs had to determine how they would use their budgets, and whether to support more staff or more projects. Most hubs sought to achieve a balance of both, but some hubs have quite heavily prioritised investment in their central hub staff, with minimal funding for projects. This does not appear to have been an optimal way for hubs to achieve cross-regional impact or partner engagement.

## Types of projects

Since commencement of the hub program, there have been upwards of 200 projects. These have often been relatively small in scale and could be as simple as single training sessions. Some projects were more complex and higher-cost, for example, involving some primary research. One hub (South-West WA Hub) sought to promote several 'transformational projects' in line with terms used in their grant agreement.

While challenging to neatly categorise, projects have enabled hubs to seed a diverse range of actions, including:

- **Information gathering and sharing:** projects to gather and share information about changes to the agricultural industry related to weather conditions and drought, soil quality, new technology and other relevant topics.
  - Examples of these activities include: Creating Drought Management Tools For North-West Pasture Managers (Tas Hub), Rangelands Mineral Testing (SA Hub) and Baseline Drought (Southern NSW Hub).
- **Capacity building projects:** seeking to improve agricultural industries' ability to adapt and thrive via better drought preparedness. This includes farmer training and workshops, scholarships and on-site engagement.
  - Some examples are Extension Training for Hub Members (SA Hub), Agronomy of Business Short Course (South-West WA Hub), place-based drought management toolkits and extension and adoption (Southern QLD Northern NSW Hub).
- **Mental or social resilience:** focusing on individual and community wellbeing, including tools to identify changes in social resilience during drought, researching the effects of drought on mental health, and developing community networks.
  - Some project examples include: Early Insights for More Resilient Communities (Southern NSW Hub), Understanding the Mental Health Impacts of Drought on Young People (Vic Hub), and Women's Voices in the Face of Drought (Vic Hub).
- **First Nations:** projects aiming to support First Nations people and businesses in agriculture and land management.
  - Examples include: Supporting Aboriginal Workforce (Northern WA and NT Hub), Supporting Drought and Climate Resilience in Aboriginal Farm Enterprises (Tas Hub), and Bana Mundu (Water is a Spirit) (Tropical North Qld Hub).

## Cross-hub projects

In addition to projects run by individual hubs, all hubs were involved in cross-hub projects. These were enabled via an additional FDF funding allocation. Cross-hub projects saw additional FDF funding for 5 cross-hub projects, which have now been completed (see [section 5.2](#) and [Appendix F](#)). This funding allowed hubs to either lead or support projects on issues affecting multiple regions. These projects tended to be higher-cost than usual hub projects. They were well regarded for their ability to bring hub stakeholders across different hubs together, promoting collaboration on a larger-scale in common areas of interest.

These projects enabled hubs to work on issues that crossed hub boundaries. While these projects were generally seen as successful and worthwhile, they were limited in their size, scope and duration, with time-limited funding and only five projects completed.

## Non-hub funded projects

Hubs have also been involved in various projects funded under other FDF programs. For example:

- hubs are involved in projects that are funded via the FDF Long-term Trials of Drought Resilient Farming Practices grants. These projects aim to investigate innovative farming techniques to build drought and climate resilience.
  - For example, the Vic Hub and Tas Hub participate in a project funded by the Long-Term Trials grant, led by the Vic Hub's host organisation the University of Melbourne.
- hubs participated in projects led by hub host organisations funded by the FDF Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes grants program. This aims to help Australia's farmers prepare for and recover quicker from drought.
  - One example is the Improved Drought Resilience Through Optimal Management of Soils and Available Water Project (Southern NSW Hub).
- Some hub projects initially started as Agriculture Innovation Grant projects (non FDF) have continued after this funding ceased, and are now supported through core hub funding and/or other sources.
  - Examples include Tropical North Qld Hub's 5 Agri-Tech innovation systematic methodology, Tropical North Qld Hub's end user beta test on-farms, Tropical North Qld's partnership with Farmers2Founders and Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub's Ag360 mobile app.

## Effectiveness of hub projects

Anecdotally, hub projects were a central way for hubs to have an impact across their regions. Small amounts of funding were able to be leveraged in areas that were seen as benefitting from further study or investment. Many of these projects would not have happened without the hub's investment.

However, the review team encountered difficulty reliably understanding the effectiveness of the suite of hub projects. There was uncertainty about the actual outputs, outcomes and impacts of each project. The reasons for this are summarised as following:

- Reporting and sharing of projects underway or completed was inconsistent across hubs, with no complete record of all the hub projects across the hub program.
- Project outcomes, such as for completed research projects, were not consistently published by hubs.
- The definition of what should be counted as a hub project was and remains unclear.
- While there were some case studies about project outcomes, the review panel found no evidence that projects had been formally evaluated.
- There were differences in hubs' depth of reporting on project outcomes.
- There are clear opportunities for enhancement to make the hub-enabled projects more accessible and impactful in future.

## 5.7 Communications and information sharing

**Finding 18:** Information sharing via hub websites varied in quantity and quality. Effective hub websites were easy to navigate, included updated information, shared project reports, had a repository of resources and grouped information into clear categories.

An important part of the hubs' role in extension and adoption is to share information about how various sectors can adapt to drought or climate variability. An key way that hubs communicate is through the information and resources on their websites.

These websites varied in relation to their content and navigability. Those that were most effective were easy to navigate, included updated information, shared project reports, had a repository of resources and grouped information into clear categories. Some helpfully included a search function to find information and resources available.

The types of information on hub websites includes newsletters, a calendar of events, project reports, resources, fact sheets, podcasts and videos. Some hubs provided detailed project reports and outcomes, while other hubs had only brief descriptions or fact sheets on projects they had conducted. Some hubs included a repository of resources, while other hubs had resources nested via their partners websites. A comparison of hub websites is in Table 6.

**Table 6 Comparison of hubs' websites**

Hub	Updated events calendar or newsletter	General information/ resources	Detailed project reports (including project outcomes)	Repository of detailed content
Northern WA and NT Hub	No	Yes	No	No
SA Hub	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Southern NSW Hub	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub	Yes	Yes	No	No
South-West WA Hub	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tas Hub	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes - but not collated
Tropical North Qld Hub	Yes	Yes	No	Yes - through node websites
Vic Hub	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes - depending on the topic

## 5.8 Other FDF programs

**Finding 19:** Hubs were not provided sufficient guidance through their grant agreements or subsequent communications about the role they should play in engaging with and helping others to navigate FDF program streams. This led to variable levels and means of involvement by hubs in the FDF more broadly. Where coordination forums existed, these were most often led by state and territory governments, with hubs as contributors. Some hubs had very limited involvement in other FDF programs.

There was little in the hub's initial grant agreements to suggest that one of their roles was to support other FDF programs. However, over time, there has been a growing expectation that hubs should play at least a support role to help sector stakeholders to navigate other FDF programs.

It is relevant that hubs were one of the earlier FDF programs to commence rollout, while many other FDF programs were in a design and pre-launch phase. The initial early focus for each hub was therefore to establish the hub's approach, staffing and other operational elements, while focusing on the hub's co-design process to define priorities and activities.

When the Adoption Officer roles were added to hubs' responsibilities in 2022, this included an expectation for this role to 'disseminate information about the FDF to relevant parties through a range of mediums (e.g. social media, face-to-face events, podcasts)' and to 'support farmers to use the tools developed through the FDF (e.g. Drought Resilience Self-Assessment Tool, Farm Business Resilience training)'.

As other FDF programs have been rolled out, there have been growing expectations on the hubs to work together where there are linkages. There are recognised opportunities for hubs to help navigate other FDF programs, given hubs' broad networks of partners.

While hubs recognise the intention to support other FDF programs across their regions, there was no formal guidance about the role they should play in engaging with and helping others to navigate other FDF program streams. As a result, there has not been consistency in their approach to doing so. Many hubs lacked detailed awareness of the details or rollout schedules for other FDF programs across their regions.

To clarify role confusion between the work of the hubs and the FDF programs more generally, some states and territories established cross-sectoral collaborative committees to oversee or support the delivery of all FDF programs in their jurisdictions. These committees aimed to improve communication around program priorities and activities, and to clarify the objectives of different FDF programs. Hubs have contributed to these committees, where they exist.

This role may be easier for hubs following the January 2025 release by the department of the Investment Strategy. This informed stakeholders about the range of FDF programs on offer. The Investment Strategy also included detail on the timing of key activities, how they interact with other non-FDF programs, how funding will be delivered, and how funded activities will be integrated (DAFF 2025a).

Stakeholders expressed that hubs are well-placed to coordinate FDF programs across their regions. They saw hubs as facilitating better information flows across FDF programs and referring relevant information to stakeholders. The SA Hub expressed via consultation that the expectation for them to provide coordination and referral activities had increased exponentially when they recently experienced drying conditions.

The major FDF programs and their hub connections are listed as following:

- Hubs were contractually required to contribute to the annual Science to Practice Forum (the forum) which occurred annually from 2021 to 2023. The forum relied on hubs to help identify presenters and information through an expression of interest process. In 2021 and 2022, the



forum was delivered online and had viewing locations at each hub, except for the Northern WA and NT Hub. The forum was online only in 2023, providing a platform for hubs to showcase their work through in-person demonstrations or snapshot videos. All hubs worked with the department to meet their delivery requirements and actively participated in the forum.

- The **Regional Drought Resilience Planning (RDRP)** program is delivered in partnership with state and territory governments. It supports partnerships of regional organisations, local government, communities, and industry to develop a Regional Drought Resilience Plan for their local community. The current phase supports 69 regions to develop plans, and provides independent expert feedback on these plans, plus small grants to kickstart implementation. The program is due to commence its second phase from July 2025 focusing on implementation of plans. Detailed co-design of the next phase is currently underway between the Commonwealth and jurisdictions.
- The RDRP program requires that regions partner with their local hub during plan development. Hub involvement in the RDRP development processes and proposed implementation is variable. For example, both the Southern Qld Northern NSW and Tropical North Qld Hubs had been extensively involved in the development of RDRP plans in Queensland, and it is proposed that the Tropical North Qld Hub takes a lead role in facilitating the implementation of pathways in several Queensland RDRP plans moving forward. By contrast, the Vic Hub was listed as a partner in 3 of 9 RDRPs, while the SA Hub is listed as a partner, steering committee member or advisory group member in 4 of 6 RDRPs, and South-West WA Hub is a steering committee member and attended technical advisory group meetings.
- The **Farm Business Resilience (FBR)** program provides subsidised capability and capacity building opportunities to eligible participants in a broad range of interconnected learning and development areas, such as: climate adaptation, NRM, transformational practices, business planning, decision-making and risk management, and personal and social resilience, including mental wellbeing.
- State and territory governments who administer the FBR in partnership with industry and other providers acknowledged that hub and FBR activities could be better aligned and coordinated to avoid duplication of services and to leverage outcomes. Stakeholders noted that in some locations, hubs offered services that duplicated the FBR's activities. Further, as co-contribution is required of FBR participants, there is potential for FBR activities to be impacted when hubs deliver similar activities at no cost.
- The FDF **Climate Services for Agriculture (CSA)** program, delivered by the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO, aimed to provide farmers with better climate information via the online tool My Climate View. The CSA (ongoing) has connected with the hubs since 2022 through in-person and virtual sessions to upskill hubs on how to use My Climate View. The department believes engagement with hubs should be considered for any upcoming contracts with CSA service providers as hubs could promote My Climate View to their user groups and continue providing feedback to help shape future iterations.
- **Extension and Adoption of Drought Resilient Farming Practices Grants** (grant round completed with 18 successful projects). This aimed to promote the adoption of proven soil management practices to build drought resilience. Successful projects were required to liaise with their

regional hub and link their projects to the hub's existing priorities. The department felt that this process supported hubs to set regional priorities early in their establishment.

- **Drought Resilience Innovation Grants** (grant round completed with 46 successful projects). This supported projects to help Australian farmers and agricultural-dependent communities and businesses to adopt innovative approaches and technologies to improve drought resilience. Grantees of 3-year innovation funding (up to \$3 million) were contractually required to engage with the hubs. This requirement was not included in the hubs' grant agreements.
- The **Drought Resilience Commercialisation Initiative** (underway) is delivered by Beanstalk AgTech. Several hubs contributed to the identification of needs and priorities for this program. Some stakeholders viewed the partnership between hubs and Beanstalk as collaborative and effective. Others noted that the nature of these arrangements was fairly informal.

## 5.9 Supporting funding applications

**Finding 20:** Many hubs are using staff time and resources to bid for additional funds from the FDF and other sources, including to support hubs, hub host organisations, hub partners or other organisations on their grant applications. This has given rise to a perception among some stakeholders that hubs and their partners have a competitive advantage in securing funds. It may also be eroding hubs' ability to build trusting and collaborative relationships across the sectors in which they work.

**Finding 21:** Hubs were successful in attracting sometimes significant additional funding from FDF and non-FDF sources. Additional funds secured early in the hub program shifted the focus of hubs at a time when they were in the process of establishing themselves, expanding their role and complicating reporting processes in relation to their core funding.

Hubs have not received guidance about the role they should, or should not, play in relation to seeking other funding, either for themselves, their host organisations, hub partners or other organisations in the sectors they support.

Notably, the then Minister for Agriculture flagged in a letter to hubs in April 2022 that there would be a process initiated for hubs to move towards a self-sustaining funding model:

It was always the intent of the Government that the Hubs be enduring, including by developing stronger partnerships with the RDCs, grower groups, production groups, agribusiness, Agtech companies, Landcare and natural resource management groups. To assist build your enduring legacy I have asked my department to design a pathway through which Hubs will have a target to become self-sustainable by mid-2024.

By the time this letter was received, hubs had already received additional funds, and this letter may have prompted hubs to continue identifying and pursuing additional funding applications, either from other FDF programs, or from non-FDF funding streams.

The types of FDF programs that hubs have pursued include: the Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes Grant Program; Drought Resilience Innovation Grants; Extension and Adoption of Drought Resilience Farming Practices Grants Program; and the Long-term Trial of Drought Resilient Farming Practices Grants Program.

Hubs had also pursued and received grant funding from RDCs, including AgriFutures and Meat & Livestock Australia.

Hubs were often quite successful in attracting sometimes significant additional funds. This served to shift the role of hubs at a time when they were seeking to establish themselves and their core functions. This expansion to their roles complicated reporting processes and made it hard for hubs to account for their core funding, relative to other sources.

Hubs have had different philosophical positions in relation to pursuit of additional funds:

- One hub expressed that they consciously avoided competing with other parties in the sector to attract grant funding, but played a role in helping partners and others to define project proposals and associated grant applications
- Another hub saw it as a core role to work with partners to identify and bid for additional funds to secure resources and projects for the betterment of their region
- Some hubs were active in supporting their host organisations to bid for funding for the hub (and partners) to deliver additional service streams
- Some hubs provided letters of support where partners were pursuing additional grant funding.

Where hubs, or their host organisations, had been actively competing for grants with other organisations in their sector, some hub stakeholders felt this worked against the hub model, which was intended to promote collaboration and cooperation across each region. Certainly, some hubs are spending significant hub staff time on applications to various grant processes.

Some hubs have proven to be very successful in attracting grants for additional services and activities. While gaining additional funds can extend the role of hubs, it also complicates the clarity of hubs' core roles and has implications on hubs' ability to report clearly on their achievements resulting from their core funding.

## 5.10 Capability building

**Finding 22:** Most hubs directed a share of their funding towards supporting scholarships, internships, PhDs or postgraduate students, linked to agriculture-related studies and projects. These activities mostly arose due to the involvement of universities in the hub model. The effectiveness of these allocations is hard to measure, will take time to fully realise and largely depends on the contribution to research findings and the agriculture sector in the longer-term.

While many extension and adoption activities sought to share information and build capability among industry organisations, advisors and producers on the ground, hubs have also used hub funds to upskill students within the university sector. This has variously involved hubs providing funding for scholarships, internships, PhDs or masters/research activities.

There was little consistency in the scale of such activities across hubs, or in the way that they supported these activities. Some scholarship opportunities were provided to enhance linkages between university research and on-ground extension and adoption activities. Others offered capacity building opportunities for individuals, students and academics to build their skills in

delivering engagement, extension and adoption support. For example, the SA Hub provided internships, leadership program scholarships and support for PhD students and honours students to work directly on hub projects being delivered through partner organisations.

Some scholarships were provided to support research related to regional priorities. For example, the South-West WA Hub provided four bursaries in 2024. One of these supported an investigation of the impact of farm management decisions on soil carbon content across the West Australia wheatbelt. Another supported the study of grain growers' adoption intentions and behaviours regarding supply chain digital technologies.

Tas Hubs' 2024 reporting indicated a total of seven training and learning scholarship opportunities were awarded (total value of \$50,250) and included supporting a Tasmanian Women in Agriculture member to attend the Marcus Oldham Rural Leadership Program. Other recipients were funded to participate in the 2024 ENABLE leadership program. This was in addition to \$30,000 of sponsorship in 2023 for participation in industry relevant training and learning opportunities.

The Tas Hub also supported four PhDs (total value \$142,500). Research topics included water use accounting and accountability in irrigated agriculture, use of e-nose technology to predict soil quality and health, and barriers and opportunities for Indigenous women's knowledge in agricultural water use, and natural capital accounting.

Tropical North Qld Hub funded five scholarships (total value of \$22,000) focused around the on-ground application of drought resilience research or expanding the geographical reach of on-ground projects.

The Vic Hub awarded five scholarships in 2024 to Master level students studying drought resilience topics across universities in Victoria (total value \$10,000).

The review panel concludes that these activities were likely chosen due to the involvement of universities as hub leads or partners for most hubs. The effectiveness of these capability-building allocations is hard to measure, will take time to fully realise and largely depends on the contribution of funded persons to generating research findings and supporting the agriculture sector in the longer-term.

## 5.11 In-drought support

**Finding 23:** Southern Australia has faced drying conditions during the first phase of the hub program. The role of hubs in providing extension and support during these periods was well regarded. However, there is a need to be clearer across the program about the role and expectations of hubs in dry conditions, recognising the responsibilities of other parties under the National Drought Agreement. There is an understandable public expectation that the hubs provide drought services or are a shopfront to access services. Measures are needed to manage this misperception.

## Experiences of drought in Tasmania and South Australia

Over the first four years of the hub program, most regions have not experienced drought. Many areas in southern Australia have experienced drying conditions, however, and both the Tas Hub and the SA Hub have provided support to their communities in response.

In Tasmania, to support drying conditions on King Island, the hub collaborated with key stakeholders to provide extension support to the community. While it was agreed that the hub would continue to work primarily on drought preparedness, in practice, there can be a fine line between drought preparation and response activities. Much of the information that hubs provide to support drought preparedness is also relevant during drought periods. Experiences in Tasmania confirmed the need for role clarity ahead of future droughts, which could be more widespread and longer-term in nature.

The review panel heard that the Tas Hub's reputation as a regionally embedded organisation supporting drought resilience was enhanced during drought. It was able to be a responsive partner to the state government to assist King Island. This was acknowledged as possible due to the success of earlier engagement processes and the strong network held by the hub.

A summary of key actions undertaken by the Tas Hub in this case are included in Box 2.

### **Box 2 Tas Hub activities in King Island across the Drought Cycle**

Due to unprecedented dry seasonal conditions on King Island in 2023–24, the Tas Hub was approached by the Tasmania Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) to explore whether they could support King Island beef producers to prepare and manage through the dry conditions.

Over subsequent months, the hub partnered with the state government, local farmer groups and industry service providers to co-design and deliver targeted workshops and on-farm events to get relevant information directly to those who needed it.

Activities included the co-funding of a King Island Community Drought Coordinator (hosted by TasFarmers), enabling access to technical expertise on the island, and the provision of dry season preparedness workshops.

Drought resilience and preparedness were also a cornerstone of the SA Hub's response to drying conditions in multiple parts of the state during 2023–24. Again, the SA Hub was well-regarded for the proactive role it played during this period. Further information is shared in Box 3.

### **Box 3 SA Hub activities across the Drought Cycle**

Several regions of South Australia received average spring rainfall in 2023 and continue to experience dry seasonal conditions (SA Hub 2024a).

In response to these conditions, in 2023–24 the SA Hub held 8 workshops on the 'Next 100 Days' and organised events including containment feeding farm visits. These workshops were attended by over 500 producers and run in collaboration with the state government, peak industry bodies and the FDF Farm Business Resilience Program. These events were focused on helping farmers to make timely and informed decisions to increase drought resilience.

The hub also held 72 Red Meat Connect Community barbeques to promote farmer wellbeing through community connection. These barbeques were run in partnership with the FDF Farm Business Resilience Program and Livestock SA.

## **In-drought role**

The review panel heard concerns regarding the clarity of roles and responsibilities of hubs during drying conditions. The hubs are one of many organisations able to provide information and support to stakeholders across all phases of the drought cycle. While the role of hubs has been somewhat

ambiguous, many stakeholders would agree that they aim to build drought resilience and drought preparation as a primary focus.

The hubs are not resourced or legally responsible for providing in-drought support at scale. Submissions from hubs and their host universities demonstrated that most hubs saw their primary role as preparing for drought, rather than drought response or recovery. The host universities of the SA, Southern NSW, Tropical North Qld and Vic Hubs were clear in their feedback that in-drought support was not within their hub's remit and providing in-drought support would distract them from other work they are expected to do.

However, some hubs identified that producers and related organisations would likely approach the hubs for support during drought. For hubs with drought in their name, this would be in part because the term 'Drought Hub' suggests an organisation providing support during drought. The Southern NSW Hub advised that in-drought, they could refer stakeholders to other resources but not provide direct assistance. The South-West WA Hub felt that hubs could go further, stating:

The hub program is well-suited to support drought response activities. Its established networks, collaborative relationships, and focus on resilience make it an ideal mechanism for coordinating and implementing response efforts. (GGA 2024)

There are clearly different views about the role that hubs should play when drought conditions return.

Clarity of role during all phases of the drought cycle, particularly in-drought, was recognised as important for both the department and the hubs. This was needed to honour the National Drought Agreement and respect the role played by the Australian Government. It seems most likely that hubs would provide an information sharing and referral service during dry conditions, so stakeholders could find appropriate sources of advice and support.

## 5.12 First Nations

**Finding 24:** The hubs have made attempts to engage in First Nations priorities via projects, staff roles and governance representation, with limited success to date, and challenges in doing so. The hubs are mostly focused on land managers practicing production agriculture which may not embrace First Nations communities in some parts of the country, and have experienced high staff turnover which has affected relationship development. It is likely that the hubs primary contribution in this area will be as part of a broader FDF approach.

Engagement with First Nations communities was expected of hubs, with the following expressed in the grant opportunity guidelines:

- incorporate Indigenous RDEA&C needs into their plans
- foster and develop Indigenous capability, skills transfer, knowledge sharing and increased cultural awareness across all parties
- consult appropriately with Indigenous groups who have an active interest in the areas where projects occur and obtain their consent

- ensure appropriate Indigenous participation in all activities.

Over the first few years, the activities pursued by each hub are summarised in Table 7. This list was originally compiled and provided to the HAC ahead of their June 2024 meeting.

Hub projects have included cultural exchange symposiums, ‘Conversations on Country’, and Yarning Circles. There is some evidence that hubs are using this material in drought resilience strategies, though it is not clear whether hubs have developed any protocols or principles around the use of this material.

This suggests that most hubs have sought to actively engage with First Nation peoples, businesses and agricultural organisations.

In relation to resourcing, some hubs tried to achieve enhanced First Nations engagement by employing a dedicated First Nations Officer (Tas Hub, Southern NSW Hub, Northern WA and NT Hub).

More often, hubs have sought to work via partner organisations where there are longer-term histories of engagement with First Nations communities. This includes working with existing advisory boards to leverage relationships in some cases (Tas Hub, Tropical North Qld Hub, SA Hub).

**Table 7 Hubs’ First Nations projects, resourcing and governance**

Hub	Projects	Resourcing	Governance
<b>Northern WA and NT Hub</b>	2 ongoing 2 completed Planning for significant future engagement	Planning to recruit a First Nations Program Coordinator	Established a First Nations Pillar Steering Committee
<b>SA Hub</b>	1 ongoing 6 completed Planning for greater First Nations participation in the hub	No specific role/officer identified	Hub staff involved in First Nations project delivery attended 2 training courses to increase knowledge of First nations culture and displacement
<b>Southern NSW Hub</b>	5 ongoing 2 completed 4 future planned activities to increase First Nations engagement and understanding	First Nations Engagement Officer on Staff	Employed a First Nations Engagement Officer
<b>Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub</b>	5 ongoing 1 completed 1 planned – to develop program of First Nations project activity	Planning to employ a First Nations Program Coordinator to lead First Nations consultation and develop a program on First Nations project activity	First Nations initiatives currently led by hub’s Knowledge Broker focusing on collaboration with Aboriginal communities
<b>South-West WA Hub</b>	1 ongoing 3 complete Planning for continued planned consultative process and interest in a	No specific role/officer identified	Two Regional Advisory Committees have First Nations members. First Nations Engagement Framework produced



## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Hub	Projects	Resourcing	Governance
	study tour for First Nations groups		
<b>Tas Hub</b>	3 ongoing 2 planned	Indigenous Facilitator has been appointed, however has commenced post graduate studies	Indigenous Facilitator embedded in the hub
<b>Tropical North Qld Hub</b>	4 ongoing 5 completed Future activities are planned through additional elements of the Sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Enterprise Program (SATSIE) program	Appointed Program Lead for the SATSIE program	Engagement with First Nation groups and individuals through the SATSIE program Establishing an appropriate way to collect activity/engagement feedback from First Nations collaborations
<b>Vic Hub</b>	2 ongoing	No specific role/officer identified	Identifying suitable entry points to engage and build trust with First Nations people and groups

There has not been specific direction on how the ambitions in this area should be achieved by hubs, so it has been left to their regional knowledge and connections to determine the best way to do so.

Some hubs raised a barrier related to the relatively short-term hub funding and fatigue among many communities.

Establishing meaningful relationships and working with Indigenous communities can need very long time frames, e.g. 5-10 years. It is key that the Federal Government consider long term financial commitment to the Hub in recognition of the regions operating environment and the long-term ambition to improve productivity and sustainability of the production systems and communities. (Northern WA and NT 2023)

This is an area that hubs are committed to pursuing, in the context of broader FDF approaches.

## 5.13 Working with producers across regions

**Finding 25:** The expectation that hubs would be able to engage on the ground with producers via a place-based model has proven to be impossible at scale. Hub resources are insufficient to provide geographical coverage across large regions and sectors, even when working via partner organisations.

All hubs sought to have a positive impact on the ground with producers. It was envisaged in the program design that hubs would achieve a place-based presence via 'shopfronts', as enshrined in grant agreements. This did not eventuate in practice, with hubs more commonly engaging partner organisations to collaborate across various regions where there is an existing regional presence.

Via regional partners, sometimes operating as 'nodes', hubs provided some on-ground supports. This included things such as community co-design activities to define priorities, delivery of



training/information sessions, attending regional events or working locally on projects involving producers.

While there were examples of engagement with producers, the review panel identified that many hubs struggled to play this role effectively on a large scale. Challenges encountered included:

- the lack of resources (e.g. staff and expertise) for hubs to equitably offer services across often large hub regions to multitudes of producers
- the large costs (both financial and time) to travel across regions to meet producers
- the need to tailor and prepare materials for on-ground engagement activity, with consideration for needs across multiple sectors, producer types and climate regions
- finding ways to work with and through partner organisations to engage effectively on-ground in ways that were meaningful, with consideration for the hosting and branding of events
- avoiding duplication with existing activities, including services already offered by partners or other parties, such as agronomists or private advisers
- accepting that face-to-face engagement models are one of many information-sharing methods, and that other methods offered hubs greater efficiency relative to cost.

While offering some advantages, the hub program's place-based intentions were not widely realised across the program. Hubs were generally limited in the coverage they could achieve across large regions. Several hubs and partners openly stated that it was not feasible for them to offer on-ground coverage across their regions, and some partners expressed the same sentiments.

Given these challenges, the review panel concludes that the intention to provide on-ground services via hubs was largely misguided. The greatest ability for hubs to have an influence was through existing organisations, while sharing tailored information for producers virtually.

# Hub operations

## 6.1 Overview

Building on discussions about hub roles, this chapter shares insights about the different approaches taken by hubs in relation to their structure and operations. It commences with a discussion about the legal status of hubs.

## 6.2 Legal status of hubs

**Finding 26:** While each hub is developing its own identity and branding, hubs are not legal entities. Their host organisations are signatories to the grant agreement with the Australian Government and any related hub subcontracts with partner organisations. Hub staff are employed by host organisations or partner organisations, and are not employed by the hub. This legal structure does not necessarily cause conflict in the day-to-day management of the hub program but means that there is no contract between hubs themselves and the Australian Government.

While each hub has its own identity and branding, hubs are not discrete legal identities, they remain part of the host organisation (though the hubs variously describe themselves as unincorporated joint ventures (UJV), consortium of partners, non-corporate or corporate state or territory entity, or other incorporated entity ([Appendix E](#)).

Each hub's grant agreement is signed by the Drought Minister's delegate (the department's Assistant Secretary responsible for the FDF), as well as a senior officer from the grantee – the hub's host organisation ([Appendix E](#)). The grant agreement sets out the terms and conditions for the operation of the hubs.

The legal status of the hubs has created some specific issues for the program. Primary among these is that while hubs have established their own governance structures separate from their host organisations to manage budgets and strategic direction, the legal authority and liability for hub operations remains the responsibility of the host organisation.

Generally, the department does not have oversight of processes for hub decision-making, or any delegation instruments that may exist between the host organisation and staff working on hub activities.

The enabling mechanism between the Commonwealth and each hub host organisation is a grant agreement. These require certain things of hubs but were written to offer flexibility. These grant agreements form the legal mechanism for ensuring that the hub program objectives are being faithfully pursued and monitored. In practice, these have served more as conditional grants than contracts for service delivery and have not been enforceable by the department in any meaningful sense.

Within each hub, a lengthy set of subcontracts have been embedded in the delivery model, in many cases with attached funding or in-kind expectations (see [section 6.4](#)). Hub host organisations are responsible for agreeing these with partners and they are not visible to the department.

When staff are recruited, employed, subcontracted or provided in-kind to undertake hub operations and activities, they cannot be employed by the hub itself as it does not have legal status to do so. Some hub staff may be involved in recruitment to the core hub team, but the host organisation ultimately plays the legal role of hirer (see [section 6.6](#)). A number of hub staff operate from within subcontracted partner organisations, working to their employment arrangements, or are provided as in-kind resources.

This web of subcontracts for services and staffing has generally limited the ability of hub host organisations to guide and oversee the delivery of priorities and to monitor staff contributions. Under this legal structure, nobody has a formal legal obligation to act in the best interests of the hub, with staff accountable first to their employing organisations.

The review heard that each hub host organisation has a diversity of other interests, some of which may not be consistent with the hub's objectives. The hub may have little authority over the broader actions of the hub host, or approaches that it takes to oversee the hub and its subcontracts. This applies to hub host decisions about mounting bids for additional grant funding that could conflict or complicate the use of hub funds.

In most cases, the department also does not have regular communication with individuals within hub host organisations who bear ultimately responsibility under the grant agreement. Communication on contract issues occurs mostly with the Hub Director, who is not formally accountable for it or subcontracts.

While this legal structure does not necessarily cause conflict in the day-to-day management of the hub program, it increases the operational complexity of the structure as a whole.

## 6.3 Hub delivery models

**Finding 27:** Hubs were given significant flexibility to define all elements of their operations, including delivery models, governance structures, staffing composition and branding. This has resulted in 8 unique hub models across the country, with some similarities but many distinct differences.

**Finding 28:** Hubs range from highly devolved models that seek to enable partners to deliver on locally identified projects, through to models where the central hub holds strategic leadership and delivery responsibilities. Hubs are trending towards greater centralisation over time to better direct and coordinate their work and achieve efficiencies within their limited budgets.

While hubs were given flexibility to define *what* they worked on, they were also given a high degree of flexibility to define *how* they worked. This included their delivery models, partner arrangements, governance, staffing and branding. This allowed hubs to shape their operations to fit different contexts and to address needs in ways they felt was most appropriate.

The review panel found, as a result, that each of the 8 hubs had structured themselves differently to promote drought preparedness across their regions. The flexibility to define their operational approaches was generally seen by hubs as advantageous.

The hub delivery models range from highly devolved through to centralised models. The review panel found no frame of reference for judging what works best. It did find however a tendency for some

hubs to move towards greater centralisation, given the challenges encountered when managing staff and determining, delivering and accounting for work completed in devolved models.

## Highly devolved models

Under such models, hubs serve as enablers (through financial and non-financial means) of their delivery partners, who are able to determine how to conduct their own activities and to report back to hubs on their achievements.

In essence, hubs that are highly devolved outsource most activities to other organisations to lead, facilitated via subcontracts with the hub host organisation. The central hub team primarily plays a coordination, project management and reporting role, providing delivery partners with autonomy to define their priorities and activities. In some cases, these partners simply receive block funding from the hub and can spend this as they see fit within the terms of their subcontract agreements, including through defining and selecting projects or running localised grants to activate project ideas.

One strength of this model is that it leverages the existing capabilities and networks of hub partners. When well set up and managed, this approach can support on-ground activity across a region and enhance the place-based contribution able to be made via the hub program. There are also examples under this model of groups of hub partners collaborating to address common challenges together. In this way, devolved hubs can draw their partnerships closer together to tackle shared challenges.

The major problem with highly devolved models is that activities and projects led by partners are distant from the central hub. This presents greater financial, project management and reporting risk, with hubs and their host organisations less able to oversee the decisions and conduct of funded partners in relation to how they deliver their activities, or the outcomes achieved.

The hub-funded staff that sit in other organisations are also less visible to the central hub. This can make it challenging to confirm the outputs and outcomes achieved by partners, particularly in areas that are using multiple funding sources.

Devolved models also face greater risks of selection bias, with hub partners potentially prioritising projects or activities that are of greatest concern to their organisations and any members they serve. While claims of selection bias are possible under other hub models, due to the autonomy provided to partners, there is greater uncertainty in devolved models.

In such models, there is also less visibility for the department to oversee project activities, with most engagement occurring through hub lead organisations, who often lack sufficient oversight of devolved partners' activities and achievements.

## Hub and spoke models

Under such models, the central hub oversees strategic direction and may manage some activities centrally, but relies upon partners across the region for local priority identification and project delivery. Partners draw on staff employed within their organisations to deliver hub activities, and in some cases enter further subcontracts to other delivery partners.

Under these arrangements, the central hub is the coordination point for the model, responsible for setting strategy, all aspects of management, communications and reporting. This is often achieved

with the support of cross-hub governance bodies to support strategy and decision-making. Partners then support the model by providing an on-ground voice into priority setting across regions. They may also deliver projects and often retain a small staff cohort to support the regional work of hubs.

These models face many of the same challenges as highly devolved models, albeit on a smaller scale. Such models tend to result in distributed effort across multiple organisations and staff, with greater difficulty retaining a consistent and coherent whole-of-hub approach. There is also a risk of variability in how partner organisations adhere to their subcontract requirements and in relation to the staff and other conditions they apply to people working as either funded or in-kind hub staff.

These models do, however, support the department to work through a central point of contact within the hub on reporting and oversight.

## Centralised models

Under these models, hub activities and operations are strategically managed and led by the central hub team. Place-based presence is not part of the model, with most of the hub team working together centrally. Projects are outsourced to partner organisations, where it is strategic to do so, while other projects are completed by the hub team.

Hubs that operate using such models tend to have greater control and oversight of their strategy, engagement and service delivery. By centralising hub services and branding, hubs are better able to coordinate the selection and distribution of projects across their regions, leveraging partner organisations where they are best placed to both identify and deliver selected projects.

These models allows hubs to work coherently towards a set of hub-wide goals, rather than goals determined by various partner organisations. They can be administratively simpler, with hub teams working together day-to-day. It also allows resources to be flexibly applied to support different sectors and project types. It also simplifies the monitoring and reporting process.

However, such models may be seen as diluting the ‘local’ or place-based focus of hub activities, particularly when applied across larger regions with diverse agricultural sectors and geography. Based on experiences to-date, these models appear best suited to smaller and/or less diverse regions.

## 6.4 Hub subcontracts

**Finding 29:** The current model of hub program delivery via a large number of subcontracted partners presents a critical risk to the program, lacks transparency to the Australian Government as the principal funder, and increases the probity risks associated with the program. It adds an additional management burden on hub host organisations, which have often faced difficulty monitoring and managing the performance of subcontracted partners.

Each hub has a relatively large number of subcontracts that support their various activities. These subcontracts are between hub host organisations and their service delivery partners, and formalise the arrangements that were proposed by each hub during the bidding process.

Subcontracts allow hub host organisations to share funding for various projects and staffing with other organisations, while others are non-financial agreements to formalise mutual support under the collaborative model.

The grant agreement between the Australian Government and each hub host organisation outlines a range of conditions and requirements that subcontractors are required to meet. The review panel heard via consultation that some partner organisations had initially resisted agreeing to these terms in the subcontract negotiations, due to the requirements imposed by the Australian Government. There is no line-of-sight in relation to these subcontracts across the hub program, so it is uncertain whether each of the expected conditions have been embedded in all partner subcontracts in practice or whether some concessions were made.

It is also unclear whether and how hub host organisations monitor partner contributions and performance. The review panel feels that in a highly disaggregated model, the risks of inappropriate use of funds rises. The administration (e.g. defining, agreeing, managing, acquitting) of multiple subcontracts also appears to be relatively inefficient across a program of this scale.

More positively, the main benefit of partner subcontracts is to extend the hub model's coverage across often large geographic regions, and to generate co-contributions (cash or in-kind) from partner organisations.

The review panel identified that there were very low levels of transparency in relation to the use of hub funds by subcontractors, including the efficiency and effectiveness of these activities. Further, there was no visibility of any further subcontracts that were entered into by partners under their subcontracts.

Though a list of subcontractors and any value contributed (either to or from them) is reported intermittently, this is not a regular part of the hub reporting cycle, so up-to-date information on partners was difficult to confirm. These details are therefore also not readily available to the department as the program manager.

In combination, the review panel suggests that the current model of hub program delivery via a large number of subcontracts presents a critical risk to the program, lacks transparency to hub program managers within the Australian Government, and increases the probity risks associated with the program. It adds an additional management burden on hub host organisations, which have often faced difficulty monitoring and managing the performance of subcontracted partners.

To quantify the scale of subcontracts, the review panel analysed available data, finding that there were hundreds of subcontracts across the 8 hubs. Some of these involved the provision of cash from the hub in return for projects or services, with over \$20 million in hub funds being provided to partner organisations between the hub program's inception and the latest subcontract reporting in December 2023.

The variation in the proportion of grant funding that is retained by the host organisation reflects the wide variability in hub delivery models, explained earlier.

## 6.5 Hub governance

### Different models in place

**Finding 30:** Governance arrangements for each hub are variable in their structure and composition. At best, these governance structures have created a platform to share ideas and make good decisions, with a range of parties involved. At worst, they have had narrow membership, discouraged collaboration or been used by partners to further their own organisational agendas. Governance arrangements at one hub have been suspended for a significant duration as a result of lack of trust between parties.

**Finding 31:** The department lacks representation on some of the hub's advisory boards, which has impaired the department's knowledge of the hub and line of sight into decision-making processes. The involvement of state and territory government representatives is also uneven, despite being a key relationship for most hubs. There is no prescribed process for inclusion of departmental or state and territory representatives, nor clarity on whether they should be full advisory board members or observers.

Under their grant agreements, hub host organisations are responsible for the establishment, management and delivery of all aspects of the hub, including its governance arrangements. Hubs defined their own governance arrangements and have proven willing to adapt these over time.

Generally, hubs have established boards or steering committees as their lead bodies, in some cases with sub-committees to provide additional inputs or advice. Chairs of hubs' leadership boards are either independent, represent the hub host organisation or are the Hub Director. Some boards do not appear to have selected chairs.

Currently, the department has involvement on some hub governance committees, but not others. The department has no involvement in the governance arrangements of hub partners. The department also lacks knowledge of the probity arrangements of each board or steering committee. Under their grant agreements, hubs are required to notify the department of any perceived or actual conflicts of interest and to take steps to resolve or otherwise deal with these conflicts. The extent to which these processes are followed is uncertain.

A departmental representative (usually the Director of the hub management team) attends the board meetings for the Tropical North Qld, Tas and Vic hubs. Despite being listed as a member of each of these boards, the department participates as an observer only, typically providing an FDF update and not being involved in decision making. The department also attends the Southern NSW Hub board meeting to provide an FDF update. The department does not regularly receive invitations to the board or steering committee meetings of the SA, South-West WA, Northern WA and NT or Southern Qld Northern NSW hubs.

Similarly, the involvement of state and territory government representatives is variable across hubs, with some serving as steering committee members, while others are invited to attend as observers.

The review panel heard from stakeholders about various hub governance challenges and concludes that some hub governance structures appear to have been more effective than others. The connection between strong governance and highly performing hubs was noted by many stakeholders. Consistent features of more effective hub boards included: having an independent

chair; a diverse membership that extends beyond the organisations receiving project funding; and clear roles and responsibilities.

Boards that were less effective tended to be chaired by Hub Directors, did not share records of decisions, or faced issues associated with conflict of interests, particularly where board members were involved in reviewing funding applications that could strongly impact the organisations or members they represented.

Table 8 summarises the current governance arrangements in place at each hub.

**Table 8 Hub governance structures and membership, at December 2024**

Hub	High level governance body	Membership	Role	Other/notes
Northern WA and NT Hub	Governing board Meets bi-monthly	Representatives from each consortium partner Independent chair	Decision making:	4 advisory working groups: Indigenous, community, industry, RDEAC providers Operations committee Audit committee
SA Hub	Institutional Management Committee Meets quarterly	University of Adelaide and PIRSA No nominated chair	Decision making	
	SA FDF Advisory Board (funded by PIRSA)	PPSA, Livestock SA, GPSA, University of Adelaide, PIRSA, Landscape Boards Independent chair	Advisory	Considers all FDF programs in SA Funded by PIRSA
Southern NSW Hub	Board Meets bi-monthly	Representatives from each consortium partner Hub Director Independent chair.	Decision making	First Nations advisory committee
Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub	Steering committee (paused in 2024)	2-yearly rotating membership selected from 5 identified sectors of the 36 hub members Hub Knowledge Broker Next Generation Council Chair DAF Qld Hub Director (chair)	Decision making	Independent Advisory Committee Node management committees
	Next Generation Council	Members 18-40 years	Advisory	
South-West WA Hub	Steering committee Meets quarterly	2 industry representatives chosen for their skills, 2 representatives of the GGA board (CSIRO and DPIRD) No nominated chair	Advisory	4 regional advisory committees
Tas Hub	Industry Advisory Board Meets bi-monthly	Up to 6 hub partners, DAFF, NRE, two senior	Advisory	Re-structured in December 2022



## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Hub	High level governance body	Membership	Role	Other/notes
		UTAS members, two industry representatives Independent chair		
Tropical North Qld Hub	Steering Committee Meets bi-monthly	3 JCU members, 3 NRM groups, First Nations representation, DAFF (Hub Director, Knowledge Broker, Program Manager) Independent chair	Decision making	Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee. Tropical North Queensland Hub Programs COP Drought Resilience Coordinators Director and NRM CEOs
Vic Hub	Investor Oversight Committee Meets quarterly	Representatives from each consortium partner, Ag Vic, DAFF. Hub Director (chair)	Advisory	Independent Chair commenced February 2025.
	Hub Operations Committee Meets monthly	Representatives from each consortium partner, Vic hub headquarters staff, Vic hub regional Director, and Hub Director (chair)	Decision making	Nodes and partners each have their own boards and/or advisory committees.

## Further hub governance case studies

The following paragraphs illustrate some of the adaptations and challenges encountered by hubs in relation to their governance arrangements, to provide further information about the various approaches.

The **Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub** steering committee is not currently operating. Its terms of reference expired in December 2023 and have not been renewed. The Hub Director explained that this was due to significant conflicts of interest within the committee. The review panel heard from one stakeholder that when operating, the committee lacked systematic processes for decision making and did not follow a strong process (e.g. agenda papers, meeting papers, minutes). At the time of the review, a new committee was planned, including with an independent chair. Until this new committee is appointed, decisions appear to be being made by the Hub Director, with some consultation with the department's hub management team.

The Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub has established a Next Generation Council, which is an advisory body designed to ensure the relevance of hub activities and projects for younger people in agriculture. Members must be 18 to 40 years old and represent primary producers, tech founders, researchers and students, Indigenous youth organisations and regional youth organisations.

The **SA Hub** also faced some governance challenges. The hub's primary decision-making body is a 2-member Institutional Management Committee (IMC), comprised of representatives from the hub's host organisation (University of Adelaide) and the Department of Primary Industries and Resources SA (PIRSA). The IMC is supported by an advisory body, the FDF Advisory Board, which was established at state level and whose sitting fees and operational costs are paid by PIRSA. The FDF Advisory Board provides advice to the IMC on the operation of the FDF in SA.

The review panel heard that the IMC is too narrow for hub decision making, given the broad member base of the SA Hub. Stakeholders suggested that a single, transparent, representative board, with some independent members, would be more appropriate for the SA Hub. This may help spread FDF funds across a wide range of stakeholders, and ensure the hub delivers on issues of need. The SA Hub Director also felt that a more representative board would be of benefit to the hub. A 2024 review on optimal governance and delivery models for the SA Hub also recommended the creation of an independent board or steering committee to drive strategic planning and make decisions on hub activities (Landscape Boards of SA 2024, SA Hub 2024b). Steps were underway to set this up.

Other recent hub reviews had also recommended changes to improve hub governance and increase transparency. A 2024 internal review of the **Northern WA and NT Hub** (3KR Consulting 2023) recommended appointing a skills-based board which would remove conflicts of interest that arose in the latest project funding approvals process. The Northern WA and NT Hub has a paid independent and First Nations members of its governing board as well as 3 sub-committees: the Audit and Risk Committee, the Pillar Approval Committee, and the Operations Committee. The Pillar Approval Committee supports the hub's 5 pillars (First Nations, human capacity, resilient landscapes, natural capital, preparation and planning). Each sub-committee has 7 to 9 members representing co-funding bodies, WA and NT governments and business representatives.

A 2024 internal review of the **Vic Hub** (Thorne 2024) also noted that hub governance arrangements lacked transparency. The findings of the Vic Hub's internal review are consistent with stakeholder views of the Vic Hub governance arrangements. The review panel heard of concerns with conflicts of interest and lack of accountability, particularly in relation to the delivery of projects by nodes. An independent Chair was recently appointed to the Vic Hub's Investor Oversight Committee.

The **Southern NSW Hub** comprises representatives from each of the 9 member organisations (called consortium or co-design partners) and has an independent chair. The board meets quarterly and has responsibilities including reporting, risk management, financial oversight, reviewing performance of the Hub Director and the overall workplan and budget. Board members interviewed as part of the hub's Annual MEL Report 2023–24 suggested that in future, board appointments should be made by an independent committee with reference to the existing board skills matrix (Southern NSW Hub 2024). This would ensure board members are best placed to make decisions to further the objectives of the hub, rather than advance the interests of their partner organisation. An advisory council was planned for the Southern NSW Hub to provide review support for research, extension, and adoption, but was found to be unnecessary and does not operate.

The **South-West WA Hub's** formal governance arrangements include a Steering Committee, which is a subset of the Grower Group Alliance Board (the hub's host organisation). The Steering Committee is independent of hub management and has delegated authority. It has co-opted and skills-based members. However, the GGA Board is accountable for program delivery and the GGA CEO has final approval on funded projects, based on alignment with strategic direction. Four Regional Advisory Committees were established in 2022 to provide guidance on priority issues impacting their regions. An Aboriginal People's Advisory Body was proposed, but did not go ahead. Instead, the hub utilises the skills of an existing group.

Following a review in December 2022, the **Tas Hub's** Steering Committee was transitioned to an Industry Advisory Board with new terms of reference that better meet the hub's governance

requirements. The Industry Advisory Board has an independent chair and includes representatives from the department (at their request), the state Department of Natural Resources and Environment, and the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture. The board now appears to be well integrated into hub decision making processes, providing advice on all decisions to the internal hub management team. All funding proposals must be consistent with the grant agreement and contribute to at least 1 of 3 of the hub's priorities (farm planning and preparedness, water or landscapes).

An August 2024 survey of the Tas Hub showed high satisfaction levels across board members and qualitative feedback emphasised the need to maintain focus on core tasks and vision, to avoid overextension, and to ensure a shared understanding of strategic goals. Board members highlighted the importance of tying projects to the hub's overall purpose and considering long-term resilience to build capacity for future challenges (Tas Hub 2024).

## 6.6 Hub teams

**Finding 32:** Hubs do not employ staff directly. As such, all the people who work for hubs are employees of other organisations, either the hub host organisation or hub partners. It is also not clear who, if anyone, is obliged to act in the best interests of the hub, particularly where staff are supported in-kind or where hub funding covers only part of a staff member's time within another organisation.

**Finding 33:** While difficult to precisely calculate, at December 2024, each hub funded between 10 and 30 full-time equivalent positions, excluding any additional in-kind time contributions. This was an area of concern for the review panel and indicated a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities between the hub and its partners

**Finding 34:** Despite generally encouraging flexibility, the department has prescribed employment of some roles, which has been counterproductive. For example, hubs established knowledge broker and adoption officer roles, with some confusion about the difference between these positions.

**Finding 35:** Some hubs had faced significant challenges recruiting and retaining staff, due to their location and insecure tenure from short-term funding.

### Employment of the hub team

Hubs are not legal entities, so do not directly employ staff. Central hub staff are employees of the hub host organisation, while partner organisations are responsible for the employment of people who may contribute to the hub program model, either via hub funded positions or in-kind support. The result is that every team member on the hub program, whether centrally or in partner organisations, has an employment interest to an organisation that is outside the hub.

This flows from the hub program's design, whereby hub host organisations and their partners need to provide in-kind support for infrastructure, payroll, IT, legal and other organisational functions. This may have offered a degree of program efficiency in the early years, as hubs didn't need to establish new organisations. They were also able to use their hub host's approach for hiring required team members. Hub host legal teams have no doubt assisted with payroll and legal concerns, particularly signing up subcontracts with partners.

In relation to the team, the hub program has relied upon a high degree of integrity and goodwill from people within the model, either via funded roles or in-kind contributions, to work for the betterment of the hub. The complication with the current arrangement arises in relation to managing conflicts of interest, whereby team members may push for involvement in hub activities where their organisation's best interests are served, rather than the hub or region's best interests.

The review panel also heard examples of funded or in-kind team members who, due to competing priorities, were not able to contribute the expected time or effort to tasks they had been allocated. There was a sense that team members from some partner organisations often needed to prioritise their work for their employer, before the hub benefited from their additional time. This issue was referenced separately by several hubs who had faced difficulty with selected partners.

Some hubs struggled to attract or retain staff, with workforce shortages facing many regions and lack of accommodation afflicting the ability to attract people to work in some regional towns. The recent short-term funding for hubs also impacted on the attractiveness of offers that could be made.

## Scale of hub teams

The review panel faced challenges in seeking to understand the total workforce of each hub, with this information not reliably provided through project reports.

One complication in seeking to define this has been that hub team members work either for the core hub team, or within partner organisations, where team members may be engaged either through hub funding, in-kind or only when the partner is involved in delivery of hub projects. Further, hubs have also engaged people via other non-core hub funding streams (e.g. regional soils coordinators).

The challenge faced by the review panel to define the size of each hub team gives rise to questions about accountability of hubs and their partners for the use of Australian Government funds. To seek to overcome this uncertainty, the review panel requested hubs to provide further specific staffing data, at December 2024. The results of this exercise are shared in Table 9, suggesting that hubs directly funded the employment of between 8 and 37 full-time equivalent (FTE) team members each, or a total of 103.765 FTE across the 8 hubs combined.

**Table 9 Summary of hub staffing, at December 2024, as advised by hubs**

Hub	Total FTE	Total team size	Team engaged only with hub funding	Team funded by hub funding and another source	Team funded by another source only
Northern WA and NT Hub <sup>a</sup>	8	8	8	0	0
SA Hub	10.8	13	12	0	1
Southern NSW Hub	7.94	24	9	6	9
Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub	27	30	21	7	2
South-West WA Hub	10.5	15	11	0	4
Tas Hub	15.6	19	16	0	3
Tropical North Qld Hub <sup>a</sup>	16.5	22	14	7	1
Vic Hub	7.425	37	19	7	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>103.765</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>31</b>

Note <sup>a</sup>: These hubs provided a range of FTE for some positions. The middle of the FTE range provided was recorded. For example, 0.75 FTE was recorded for 0.5 – 1.0 FTE range provided.

## Place-based model

The grant agreement suggested that hubs should seek to establish ‘shopfronts’ for the drought hubs across each region, but this was not progressed by any of the hubs in a meaningful way. Instead, hubs tended to focus on building their regional presence via partner organisations that already operated across the region and had ready networks that could be drawn on.

Based on the funding provided and recognising the large geography of each region, plus diversity of sectors in some locations, the place-based intent of the hub program was not feasible at scale. Most partner organisations provided less than a single FTE team member to play a cross-regional extension and adoption role, with limits to the scale of engagement that was achievable.

However, hubs emphasised that the biggest benefits of their engagement with partner organisations was to extend their reach, often via close links to the farming groups who were targeted for support. This was assisted through information sharing via hub and partner mailing lists, websites and social media platforms. This enabled hubs to reach many people across their regions virtually, if not physically.

## Staff required

The grant agreement with each hub required that each employ a Hub Director and a Knowledge Broker to connect information, people and capabilities across the region. Additional funding for the employment of Adoption Officers was made available between 2022 and 2024. Each hub delivered on these requirements, tailored to their regional setting. Many hubs have adapted the roles in their teams over time to meet the workload requirements. This section further details the various key roles that hubs were required to establish.

## Hub directors

At the commencement of the program, Hub Directors were generally appointed from existing staff from the host organisation. In many cases, this resulted in individuals with academic skills and experience being appointed to lead the hub.

The review heard consistently that the skills required by Hub Directors was more akin to a chief executive officer than an academic. To be successful, a Hub Director needed to provide strong leadership, oversee strategy and play a key role in community engagement, MEL and governance. Stakeholders often attributed the success of individual hubs to the strong leadership of their directors. Several hubs had navigated a change of director over time (e.g. Vic Hub, Northern WA and NT Hub, Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub, Tas Hub).

## Knowledge brokers and adoption officers

Each hub determined a different model for their knowledge brokers and adoption officers. For example, Tas Hub, SA Hub, Tropical North Qld Hub and Vic Hub had single people serving as knowledge brokers for the whole hub. By contrast, the Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub had three knowledge brokers (covering drought resilience, First Nations and innovation respectively). Southern

NSW Hub at one stage had 32 knowledge brokers, but during the review, this was being reduced significantly.

As outlined in [section 4.4](#), in March 2022 funding was made available for hubs to recruit Adoption Officers to work with farmers and their communities to use relevant knowledge and tools to support innovative drought resilient practices. Hubs received \$375,000 per hub, per year, over three years, for this role. Hubs utilised these funds in different ways. For example, Southern NSW Hub established a network of Adoption Officers, including 5 officers (4 full-time and 1 part-time) funded by the hub and located in their partner organisation, NSW Local Land Services. The hub is moving more toward a model of having one Adoption Officer in hub headquarters.

For the SA Hub, sector-specific Adoption Officers were engaged. These were considered by the SA Hub to be crucial to the success of the model in this region, given their deep industry knowledge and ability to engage effectively in extension and adoption.

Given the differences within and across hubs in the way they structured the work of Knowledge Brokers and Adoption Officers, stakeholders reported confusion between these roles. People in different hubs shared the same job titles, but had very different functions within variable delivery models.

## Managing the hub team

Hubs recognised soon after commencement that a number of additional staff roles were required for the hub to be successful. Over the first few years, hubs engaged such roles as: deputy directors; operations managers; communications officers; finance managers; and monitoring and evaluation or reporting officers. These largely reflected the significant strategy and management tasks that were needed to support hubs.

During the review period, a number of hubs were winding back their allocation of staff funding to partners, including some nodes. Some hubs felt that node staff may not have been adequately delivering on their hub roles and responsibilities, with the hub seen as secondary to the partner organisation's primary responsibilities.

Some hubs also experienced difficulties recruiting suitably skilled staff, both among nodes and into key roles. In some cases, hubs have used staff located remotely to the areas they serve. Other hubs have used consultants to manage complex requirements, such as MEL reporting.

Hubs also reflected a degree of funding uncertainty as an impediment to their ability to hire their teams on longer-term contracts. Hubs expressed difficulty attracting key people to the hub, along with the need to build long term relationships and to deliver on the hub's goals over time.

## 6.7 Hub naming and branding

**Finding 36:** Hubs have defined their own names and brands, each with local relevance but little consistency across the model. As many hubs deliver activities via partner organisations, it has taken time for the hub program to generate brand recognition across regions. This has only happened to a limited extent so far.

Hubs have not used a consistent public naming or branding. Hubs were given authorisation by the department to use names that resonated in their regions. The review panel heard that some regions

had little resonance with the use of the word ‘drought’, while others wanted to recognise their innovation function more strongly, particularly given the additional funds received for this purpose early into the hub program. None of the hubs routinely use their official name – Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub.

Across the national network of hubs, the following names are currently in use, based on each hub’s website:

- Northern Hub: Northern Western Australia and Northern Territory Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub
- SA Drought Hub: South Australian Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub
- Southern NSW Innovation Hub: Southern NSW Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub
- SQNNWSW Innovation Hub: Southern Queensland Northern New South Wales Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub
- SW WA Hub: South-West WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub
- TAS Farm Innovation Hub: Tasmanian Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub
- TNQ Drought Hub: Tropical North Queensland Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub
- Vic Hub: Victorian Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub

Hubs were expected to include FDF branding during their activities and to recognise that funding is from the Australian Government. The review panel heard that had mostly occurred in practice.

As a result of some hubs being serviced by hub partners, a few hubs expressed that brand awareness of the hubs may have taken longer to build. The Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub highlighted this difficulty in their submission to the review:

As the hub is committed to partnerships and strengthening the sustainable capacity of our partners to build upon their trusted relationships with regional networks, communities and stakeholders, at times it would appear that end-users do not always have a clear awareness of the role of the hub. (Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub 2024b)

Similarly, Charles Sturt University, the host organisation for the Southern NSW Hub, also highlighted difficulty in building stakeholder awareness across NSW due to working via partner organisations to facilitate engagement:

The [Southern NSW] Hub conducts all its farmer facing and community on the ground activities through its partner organisation (e.g. NSW Local Land Services, farming system groups and NSW Department of Primary Industries) because these organisations have established trusted relationships with farmers and community. As a result, farmers and community members often don’t have clear line of sight to the hub as an entity. (CSU 2024)



However, the review panel heard during consultation that many hubs felt they were becoming better recognised over time as they matured as organisations, engaged frequently and via various mediums, and generally found a place in the delivery structure.

## 6.8 Hub funding allocations

**Finding 37:** Hub funding was distributed equally to each hub, regardless of their geographical area, sectors or related available services. The funds were limited relative to the scope of work and scale of operation anticipated, which left hubs to make choices about priorities they wished to pursue. There has been no reconciliation of those choices against the grant agreement commitments.

The hub program's initial funding of \$64 million was distributed equally across the 8 hubs for the period 2020–21 to 2023–24 (DAWE 2020), with an additional payment of \$2 million provided to the University of New England, Armidale Node as part of the Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub. The funding distribution did not consider variations in hubs' geographical area or climatic conditions (including future drought frequency or severity), or the availability of existing services in each region.

Hubs had a large scope of work and scale of operation anticipated in the grant agreement. The grant agreement expected hubs to co-design a set of regional priorities, based on partner and community engagement. In practice, hubs had to make choices about priorities they wished to pursue based on their funding. During this period, most hubs seem to be using core hub funding to deliver small projects targeting regional priorities, collaborations and applied research, and were not able to undertake research at large scale. Many hubs also applied for FDF and other grants on behalf of their host organisation or partners. Where successful, this enabled hubs to access additional funds for staff and projects. The department and individual hubs have not undertaken a reconciliation process of each hub's choices about priorities against their grant agreement commitments.

## 6.9 In-kind and cash contributions

**Finding 38:** The hub program encouraged significant in-kind or cash contributions from hub host organisations and subcontracted partners. Hubs were generally successful in attracting in-kind support, but cash contributions have generally fallen far short of the amounts originally envisaged.

**Finding 39:** Despite structural challenges with the hub program, many of the arising practical operational difficulties have been overcome through the goodwill towards the program shown by the hubs, their partners and the department's staff.

Under the terms of hubs' grant agreements, each hub was required to obtain 'other contributions' – either cash or in-kind – to an amount at least equal to \$8 million for use on hub activities. Reflecting its higher level of grant funding, the Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub was required to source \$10 million in other contributions.

In practice, most of the co-contributions generated have been for in-kind resources. At 30 June 2024, a total of \$85.659 million had been provided in cash and in-kind contributions across the 8 hubs (Table 10). Of this, 90.4% was in-kind contributions (\$77.407 million), and only 9.6% (\$8.252 million) involved cash contributions.



By June 2024, 6 of the 8 hubs had obtained co-contributions equal to or greater than the amount required in their grant agreements. Reported co-contributions ranged from \$6.9 million for the Northern WA and NT Hub, up to \$16.4 million for the Vic Hub (Table 10).

It should be noted that the department has not issued formal guidance to hubs on how to calculate in-kind contributions. Unlike for the acquittal of grant funding expenditure, there are no auditing requirements for in-kind contributions. As such, the methodology for calculating the value of in-kind contributions differs from hub to hub, and the review team identified calculation differences in many of their progress reports. As such, it is difficult to compare the value of in-kind contributions across hubs, or to assess with any confidence whether each hub has or will reach its co-contribution goals.

**Table 10 Co-contributions received at 30 June 2024**

Hub	Cash contribution (\$m)	In-kind contribution (\$m)	Total (\$m)	Proportion of commitment relative to grant agreement (%)
Northern WA and NT Hub	0.7115	6.209	6.920	87
SA hub	2.775	7.247	10.022	125
Southern NSW Hub	0.9	12.355	13.255	125.5
Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub	0.84125	7.682	8.523	85
South-West WA Hub	0.02	10.653	10.673	133
Tas Hub	0.46772	9.538	10.005	125
Tropical North Qld Hub	1.377	8.460	9.837	123
Vic Hub	1.159	15.264	16.424	205
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8.252</b>	<b>77.407</b>	<b>85.659</b>	-

# Hub reporting

Hubs have been required to provide a range of reports under the terms of their grant agreements, including MEL reports, progress reports and financial reports. This section comments on hub reporting issues, including content, clarity and use.

## 7.1 Reporting requirements

**Finding 40:** Reports required by hubs were inconsistent in relation to their time periods, duplicative in their content and often difficult to prepare across networks of partners involved. As a result, reports were resource consuming for hubs to complete and of limited real use for program or grant management purposes.

Each hub was required to produce the following strategy and reporting documentation, which was then shared with the department:

- Operational Plan, including:
  - Communications and engagement plan
  - Risk plan
  - Budget
- MEL Plan (completed 2022)
- Activity Work Plan (every 12 months, to describe activities that hubs are prioritising):
  - Roles of the project team and project partners
  - How each of the activities will be undertaken
  - Main deliverables and timing
  - Methodology and justification for the chosen approach
  - Details of co-contributors and their roles
  - How other stakeholders will be engaged
  - Description of the outcomes sought from each activity
  - How activities will be monitored, evaluated and communicated
- Progress Reports (rolling 6-monthly reporting periods), incorporating:
  - Overview and certification
  - Hub director's report
  - Finance report and summary
  - Adoption officers report
  - Communications report
  - Risk report
  - Milestone self-assessment
- Annual MEL reports (annual, financial year), including:
  - Data capture template in Excel templated format (required every 6-months)
  - Case studies (occasional)

- Hubs were also required to provide independently audited financial acquittal reports on the grantees' and hub member's receipts and expenditure related to the grant, along with other contributions and other activity contributions, for the following two periods:
  - from the hub start date in 2021 to 30 June 2022 (completed)
  - from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2026 (by 31 October 2026).

The review panel identified the following issues with current reporting processes:

- Separate progress and MEL reports were required of hubs, but these covered different time periods (progress reports are over a 6-month period, MEL reports are over a 12-month period).
- An additional round of MEL data capture is required to be reported 6-monthly, despite MEL reports being annual.
- MEL reports respond to a set of department-defined outputs and outcomes, but these are not linked to hub's actual work, as outlined in activity work plans.
- Progress reports include numerous attachments that were sometimes duplicative in their content.
- Within progress reports, some hub team member roles (e.g. directors, adoption officers, communications) provide formal report-backs, while others do not (e.g. knowledge brokers).

The review panel repeatedly heard about the large reporting burden that hubs needed to resource and manage, taking significant effort in production. Hubs expressed frustration about the reporting burden to the review panel, and also noted that they were generally unclear how the diverse and regular set of reports were used by the department in any case.

The department in response suggested that reports provided by hubs were reviewed and used to support executive and ministerial briefings and updates. The hub management team also used these reports to familiarise themselves more deeply with the work of the hubs and to acquit for program funds upon acceptance of reports. There was, however, little evidence that the department used hub reports to analyse and share learnings or good practices across hubs.

## 7.2 Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)

**Finding 41:** Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) reporting processes were challenging for hubs for many reasons relating primarily to: the timing of MEL activities; challenge reliably counting outputs; lack of baseline data; inability to define or reliably measure outcomes; issues collecting and compiling data from numerous delivery partners; and need to adapt to frequent changes in reporting templates. This resulted in high administrative effort by hubs, but low utility of MEL reports.

**Finding 42:** The hub program's monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) focus was on monitoring of activities and outputs. There has been little focus on evaluation of activity and no evidence that MEL reports were used to identify and guide hub or program performance improvements. There was also no effort to compile a national picture of progress or lessons across the hub program by the department.

**Finding 43:** Since hubs were established, there have not been performance benchmarks defined for hubs to pursue.

When the hub program commenced, the department was still in the process of developing a MEL framework for the FDF as a whole. While this included a program logic for the FDF, there was only a generic program logic developed for the work of the hubs, which was not tailored to their actual priorities or delivery approaches.

The hub grant agreements required MEL plans to be developed by each hub to monitor and report on their achievements over time. With hubs commencing in June 2021, they were required contractually to submit MEL plan drafts to the department by January 2022. To help them meet this timeline, hubs were provided with a generic MEL template, as drafted for the hub program by a consultant, which tended to be used as a basis for hubs' MEL plans.

The timing for completion of the MEL plans did not allow them to first settle their priorities and services, and needed to be embedded while they were still in the process of building the partnerships and operational approaches for the hub.

This resulted in MEL plans that:

- were fairly generic, based on the template provided, without a close connection to hubs' local priorities or delivery approaches
- did not collect or document a baseline dataset, making it more difficult to monitor changes over time
- lacked clarity about how to measure key drought resilience outcomes.

The department attempted to guide hubs' MEL endeavours, engaging a consulting firm to develop the MEL template which hubs used as a basis for their MEL plans. The department established associated templates for MEL reporting, including data capture excel templates, which sought to standardise the fields that hubs were expected to collect and report on. These frequently changed, requiring hubs to collect new datasets or adapt their reporting approaches.

At least initially, most hubs underestimated the time that MEL activities would require. Without a requirement in their grant agreements to engage a MEL staff member, many hubs were reactive in scaling up to match the required MEL workload. Over time, hubs have moved to either embed MEL expertise into their staffing models (either via employing a MEL expert or using hub management staff) or used external consultants to complete this function.

The department's attempts to standardise reporting across hubs did not result in comparable collection methods or reliable information across hubs. Perhaps as a result, no whole-of-program reports on hub program achievements were produced.

In the main, hubs struggled to identify, collect and report on tangible outcomes, with MEL reports most often sharing lists of activities/outputs, along with some case study stories. Despite attempts by the department to better define the outcomes that hubs should report on, these were largely beyond the ability of hubs to either measure or influence at scale.

Hubs also faced challenges working with their subcontracted partners to generate reliable, comparable and targeted monitoring information. They also encountered variable expertise among partners and faced challenges meeting reporting timeframes as a result.

Added to this challenge, hubs and their partners were often unable to isolate the use of core hub funds from other funded activities. In their MEL reports, hubs were expected to share only those activities that were delivered with core hub funding, but in practice this did not prove possible. Hubs also had other reporting requirements with different templates for some of their other funding streams.

Some of what hubs were trying to measure was not possible in practice, with data collection approaches not yet settled for the FDF more broadly. As the PC noted in 2023, the FDF MEL framework lacked clarity about *how* to measure key drought outcomes, including social, economic and environmental resilience (PC 2023). Another area without an agreed measurement approach related to the key role hubs sought to play in engaging with other organisations.

As a result of all these factors, and in spite of extensive MEL efforts by all hubs, the MEL reports were of limited use in accurately summarising or compiling the outcomes achieved by hubs. Across hubs, reports were also variable in their length and quality and were not comparable.

Also, the MEL activities by hubs have focused entirely on monitoring. There was no evidence via the review that hubs had undertaken evaluation activities, for example, in major areas of investment or effort.

As a result of convoluted MEL reporting, across the program, it has been difficult to achieve an overall assessment of the outputs and outcomes achieved through the hub program.

The experience of hubs appears symptomatic of broader MEL issues faced across the FDF. As highlighted by the PC (2023), across the entire FDF *‘planning and implementation of MEL has been hampered by the hasty roll out of programs and a lack of dedicated resources’*. This is an area of continuing major investment under the FDF. The PC also emphasised that programs should be designed alongside MEL plans.

These sentiments were echoed in a 2023 Grosvenor Public Sector Advisory Report into FDF’s MEL, which concluded that MEL reporting approaches for programs in the FDF were often not well planned. The report identified challenges with the timing of reporting periods in grant agreements, noting that for some programs, ‘the timing of program commencement and reporting did not allow enough time for activities to be completed before reports were due to be provided’ (Grosvenor 2023). This was true for hubs, who were required to commence MEL reporting while establishing their functions and structure.

## 7.3 Other hub reports

**Finding 44:** The 6-monthly Hub Directors Reports were most useful to the department in providing a summary of each hub’s priorities and activities, along with any arising issues.

**Finding 45:** Financial reporting practices across hubs lacked transparency and reliability. Reporting from hubs on co-contributions have also been variable, without a consistent approach to calculating cash and in-kind contributions.

**Finding 46:** Hub progress reports were the mechanism to unlock milestone payments to hubs. These did not serve as effective compliance tools, with the department uncertain if funding could be withheld due to report contents.

The six-monthly progress reports are the main mechanism for the department to release milestone payments to hubs, upon approval. There were few examples of these reports being effective compliance mechanisms, or resulting in withholding of payments to hubs.

The department suggested that they gained significant insight and value from Hub Directors reports, which provided an overview of hub activities and challenges during each reporting period. Conversely, risk reports from hubs tended to focus only on a few simple project management risks and often did not describe the full list of risks encountered by hubs.

Hubs provided financial summaries of their activities, but often using their own reporting formats, rather than a consistent approach across the hub program. These have been challenging to interpret or compare across hubs, with financial data being calculated and presented in different ways by different hubs.

The department found also that hub financial reports lacked transparency and contained inconsistencies, and some did not include key information. As a result, a template for these reports was recently introduced, with instructions for hubs to follow.

Even with these adaptations, financial reports from hubs generally did not provide a detailed picture of revenue or expenditure, at both a program and project level. The acquittal of program expenditure was inconsistent across hubs and over different reporting periods contained inaccuracies and errors. For example, the reporting of 'administrative costs' differs across hubs, with some including governance and 'core' hub staff under administrative costs, while others separately identify these as expenses. Determining the use of funds within a given hub is complicated by the often extensive use of subcontracted partners for delivery of hub activities. The opaqueness of financial reporting presents a particular area of risk in a delivery model of this nature.

Hubs suggested that they encountered challenges in reporting their co-contributions accurately, with little guidance provided from the department on how these should be calculated. In-kind contributions have also been particularly unclear, with hubs taking quite different approaches to counting in-kind contributions.

Both the department and the review panel found it difficult to understand whether activities listed on hub websites and in reports were funded via core hub funding or from other sources. Many hubs did not specify the funding sources for each of their activities, making it difficult to determine the hubs' core outputs and outcomes.

In combination, while reporting process provides a degree of insight into the activities of each hub, they are variable in their quality and reliability and not easily comparable across hubs, making it difficult to form a whole-of-program picture.

# Hub program management

This section discusses the role played by hub program governance bodies, plus the role of the department in providing central support for the work of the hubs.

## 8.1 Hub Advisory Committee effectiveness

**Finding 47:** The Hub Advisory Committee (HAC) has had various iterations since its introduction in 2021 but has been largely ineffective in working with hubs to support their performance improvement. Instead, the HAC has been seen as more of an accountability function than its original expert advisory role, as have the joint HAC and Future Drought Funds Consultative Committee meetings.

The HAC has progressed through several iterations in its function over time, with changing membership and revisions to the terms of reference.

The HAC was established in 2021 to play a proactive oversight role, visiting hubs on a semi-regular basis to meet with hub staff and their partners. During this early period, hub stakeholders and HAC members believed that the committee was able to help influence the strategic direction of hubs. The HAC developed a greater appreciation for the hub context and people working within each hub and was able to provide additional support, where needed. One example of this was the HAC's assistance to the Tas Hub, which faced leadership and performance concerns in 2022. Though this model was relatively costly, it provided the HAC with a hands-on role in offering support to the fledgling hubs.

Following a reduction in departmental funding in 2023, the HAC was not able to travel to hubs. This impacted HAC's ability to provide tailored advice to hubs, with less-regular (approximately quarterly) meetings that focused largely on listening to report-backs from hubs. While these meetings involved presentations from Hub Directors, the HAC also received information briefings from the department based on hub reports. In essence, they were engaged during this period to review hub activities, rather than being a trusted hub partner for advice or support.

A third iteration of the HAC has been extended until mid-2025, with a small ability to travel. Current members of the HAC felt that their current funding did not allow them to perform their oversight and support role as effectively as they would like.

As required in its terms of reference, HAC provided written reports sharing their observations to the minister after every HAC meeting between 2021 to early 2024. These reports were generally high-level and identified challenges with specific hubs, often only once the issues had been resolved. Under its current terms of reference, the HAC is required to write to the minister to advise on progress and significant issues only, as appropriate.

Hubs reflected that more recent iterations of the HAC have been unable to add value to their approach or operations. The HAC had not been able to address lingering questions about the role and function of hubs. Hubs also felt that they had limited time with the HAC and suggested that HAC felt like a review process rather than a supportive forum for advice.

Similar sentiments were heard from Hubs about the joint FDFCC and HAC meeting, with a feeling that hubs were being reviewed individually at these forums, rather than these meetings providing a way for hubs to jointly discuss program issues as a collective.

After the joint HAC and FDFCC meeting in 2024, letters were sent to each hub suggesting potential improvements to their outputs and strategic directions. These letters were largely about the general direction of the broader program and contained some tailored feedback for each hub based on their presentations to the committees. Review of these letters showed that feedback was generally high level in nature.

## 8.2 Departmental management and support

**Finding 48:** The department has faced resource constraints and high turnover throughout much of the establishment phase of the hub program, impacting on the level of guidance and support available to hubs.

**Finding 49:** Since 2024, the hubs management team has offered more targeted support to hubs, and increased its travel to hubs to build relationships, resulting in a greater appreciation for the context and work of each hub.

**Finding 50:** The 4 communities of practice (COP) and the Hub Director's Steering Committee have been effective in regularly connecting staff across hubs.

### Senior staff

The Principal Director has a complex role in the hubs' management and governance, providing both support and advice to Hub Directors, and advocating the needs of hubs to the department's executive and minister. They also hold the hubs to account for delivery of the grant agreement.

Management of the hub program accounts for approximately 60 percent of the Principal Director's responsibilities. The Principal Director engages with Hub Directors on how they manage their hubs, including financial and staffing issues. Hub Directors seek advice from the Principal Director on the hubs' role and strategic direction. There is some uncertainty on whether host organisations or the department (through the Principal Director) are responsible for the wellbeing of Hub Directors.

In the first 3 years of the program, the Principal Director conducted monthly meetings with each hub director. This process was supported by the hub management team. Since July 2024, these monthly one-on-one meetings have transitioned to the hub management team with the director and team member responsible for overseeing each hub meeting with each hub director. Outside of the Hub Directors Steering Committee (chaired by the Principal Director), they now meet with Hubs Directors on an as-needs basis only.

Under the grant agreement, the department can issue a letter of concern to a hub relating to anything that is likely to adversely affect the hub, such as grant management or performance issues. Letters of concern are approved and signed by the Assistant Secretary of the FDF Strategy and Delivery Branch. Via this process, the department manages hubs and their grant agreements, though this imposes a degree of role duplication between the department and the functions of the HAC. To date, two letters of concern have been issued.



## Hub management team

Generally, the departmental management and support provided was well-regarded by hubs. Hubs shared the sentiment that FDF staff involved in program management and support were responsive, supportive and invested in the hubs' success. However, hubs also noted that this team was limited in its scale and support during the critical establishment phases of the program and during much of the first phase of the hub program's rollout.

The hub management team's staffing levels were limited in the first 3 years and resourced mainly through contracted and non-ongoing staff. Hubs identified that the hub management team's high staff turnover had been an issue, with the time invested to onboard and upskill new staff about the hub's approach (GGA 2024). It also resulted in a loss of corporate knowledge across the hub management team.

From 2020 to 2023, a significant role of the hub management team was to facilitate additional funding to hubs. This included FDF funding for Adoption Officers and the 5 cross-hub projects, as well as the agricultural innovation funding. One additional full-time equivalent (FTE) staff member was provided to the hub management team to support the agricultural innovation funding until 2023. The team continued to manage the innovation funding until activity finished on 30 June 2024.

In 2024, additional ongoing resources were provided to the FDF Innovation and Adoption Branch as part of an additional \$44.2 million over 4 years in departmental funding to ensure the effective management of the FDF (DAFF 2024d). As part of this funding, departmental resources for the hub management team were scaled up to better manage and support the program and hubs ([Section 4.6](#)). Selected team members have been allocated responsibility for overseeing 2 to 3 individual hubs, as well as a program stream, such as MEL.

Since this time, the hub management team's role has evolved from one that was focused on the establishment and management of the hub program to a role that is more of a partnership with each hub to deliver outcomes and provide targeted support. This has changed the team's focus from mainly operational activities to more of a national strategic approach. Hub management team members have also been able to travel to hubs, allowing for closer relationships to be built with hubs and supporting a greater understanding of hub activity.

Hub Directors generally had a positive view of the Hub Directors Steering Committee, which gave them a formal way to collaborate across the hub program. While there was some disappointment from hubs about the reduced meeting schedule for the committee (see [section 4.6](#)), the ability to continue meeting without department representatives present appeared to be operating well and supported regular collaboration across hubs.

Hubs generally felt that the communities of practice were very valuable, working well, and helping to build an understanding and communication channels across the hub program). Notably, the communications community of practice is now led entirely by the hubs, rather than being guided by the department, since July 2023.

## The role of the RIC Board

**Finding 51:** The legislated role of the Regional Investment Corporation (RIC) Board in providing advice on FDF grants and arrangements does not appear to have added value to the hub program.

A number of reviews and inquiries have recommended that the current requirement for the Minister to consult the RIC Board on all FDF grants and arrangements be removed, citing that this process does not add value to the FDF.

In the case of the hub program, the requirement to seek advice from the RIC Board on FDF grants and arrangements does not appear to have added value to the hub program. The need to consult with the RIC Board is also likely to have contributed to delays to funding agreement variations.

# References

3KR Consulting 2023, *Northern Hub 2.0 Stakeholder Consultation Insights Report*, internal report to the Northern WA and NT Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub. Unpublished.

ABARES 2023, [Snapshot of Australia's Agricultural Workforce](#), *ABARES Insights*, Issue 3, October 2023, Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences, Canberra, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25814/x21d-td14> CC BY 4.0, accessed 12 December 2024.

— 2024, [Snapshot of Australian Agriculture 2024](#), *ABARES Insights*, Issue 1, March 2024, Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences, Canberra, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25814/473z-7187>, accessed 12 December 2024.

Arts Law Centre of Australia 2011, [Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property \(ICIP\)](#), Sydney, accessed 19 March 2025.

BOM 2021, [Previous droughts](#), Bureau of Meteorology, Canberra, accessed 12 December 2024.

Cirera, X, Frías, J, Hill, J & Li, Y 2020, [A Practitioner's Guide to Innovation Policy. Instruments to Build Firm Capabilities and Accelerate Technological Catch-Up in Developing Countries](#), World Bank, Washington DC, accessed March 2025.

COAG 2018, [National Drought Agreement 2018](#), Council of Australian Governments, Canberra, accessed 23 January 2025.

Commonwealth of Australia 2015, [Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper](#), Canberra, accessed 12 December 2024.

Commonwealth, states and territories 2024, National Drought Agreement 2024 to 2029, Parties to the National Drought Agreement, Canberra, accessed 23 January 2025.

Craik, W 2024, [Review of the Operation of the Regional Investment Corporation Act 2018](#), Canberra, July, accessed 11 February 2025.

CRRDC 2024, [Submission \(no. 13\) to the Future Drought Fund Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs review](#), Council of Rural Research and Development Corporations, Canberra, accessed 15 November 2024.

CSIRO 2024, [Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Principles](#), Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, Canberra, accessed 19 March 2025.

CSIRO & BOM 2020, [State of the Climate 2020](#), Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and the Bureau of Meteorology, Canberra, accessed 15 November 2024.

CSU 2024, [Submission \(no. 14\) to the Future Drought Fund Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs review](#), Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, accessed 30 November 2024.

DAFF 2021, 'Grant Agreement for the Future Drought Fund: Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs' [unsigned template], Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, p.5. Unpublished.

—2023, [Funding brought forward to help prepare for drought](#), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, 27 October, accessed 12 December 2024.

—2024a, [Australian Government Drought Plan](#), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, December, accessed 30 November 2024.

—2024b, [History of drought policy](#), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, accessed 30 November 2024.

—2024c, [Drought Resilience Research and Adoption Program](#), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, 28 May, accessed 19 March 2025.

—2024d, [Next phase of the Future Drought Fund](#), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, accessed 12 December 2024.

—2025a, [Future Drought Fund Investment Strategy](#), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, accessed 25 February 2025.

—2025b, [Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs](#), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, 21 January 2025, accessed 27 March 2025.

—2025c, [Future Drought Fund annual report 2023–2024](#), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, accessed 12 February 2025.

DAWE 2020, [Future Drought Fund Drought Resilience Research and Adoption Program Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs](#), Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Canberra, 30 October, accessed 12 February 2020.

Department of Finance 2024, [Future Drought Fund](#), Canberra, accessed 11 February 2025.

Farmers for Climate Action 2024, [Submission \(no 19\) to the Future Drought Fund Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs review](#), Victoria, accessed 19 March 2025.

GGA 2024, [Submission \(no 9\) to the Future Drought Fund Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs review](#), Grower Group Alliance, Western Australia, accessed 12 February 2025.

Grosvenor 2023, *Drought Resilience Funding Plan mid-term evaluation, Final Report*. Unpublished.

IPCC 2021a, [AR6 Working Group 1 – Conclusions on the evolving risk of drought](#), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, accessed 5 February 2025.

—2021b, [AR6 Climate Change 2021: Regional Fact Sheet – Australasia](#), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, accessed 5 February 2025.

Kirono, DG, Round, V, Heady, C, Chiew, FH & Osbrough, S 2020, [Drought projections for Australia: updated results and analysis of model simulations](#), *Weather and Climate Extremes*, vol 30, December 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wace.2020.100280>, accessed 12 February 2025.

Landscape Boards of SA 2024, [Submission \(no. 18\) to the Future Drought Fund Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs review](#), South Australia, accessed 12 February 2025.

Livestock SA 2024, [Submission \(no 10\) to the Future Drought Fund Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs review](#), South Australia, accessed 19 March 2025.

NFF 2024, [Submission \(no 27\) to the Future Drought Fund Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs review](#), National Farmers Federation, Canberra, accessed 19 March 2025.

Northern WA and NT Hub 2023, [Submission \(no 11\) to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of Part 3 of the Future Drought Fund Act 2019](#), Northern Hub, Darwin, accessed 19 March 2025.

PC 2009, [Productivity Commission Report No.46: Government drought support](#), Productivity Commission, Canberra, accessed 30 November 2024.

—2023, [Productivity Commission Inquiry Report No. 102: Review of Part 3 of the Future Drought Fund Act, Productivity Commission](#), Canberra, accessed 30 November 2024.

SA Hub 2024a, *Directors Report*, internal report by the South Australia Drought Resilience Adoption & Innovation Hub, South Australia. Unpublished.

—2024b, SA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub Review Consultation Report, internal report by the South Australia Drought Resilience Adoption & Innovation Hub, South Australia. Unpublished.

Southern NSW Hub 2024, *Annual MEL Report 2023–24*, internal report by Southern NSW Drought Resilience Adoption & Innovation Hub, New South Wales. Unpublished.

Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub 2024a, *Annual MEL Report 2023–24*, internal report by Southern Qld Northern NSW Drought Resilience Adoption & Innovation Hub, Queensland. Unpublished.

—2024b, [Submission \(no. 11\) to the Future Drought Fund Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs review](#), Southern Qld Northern NSW Drought Resilience Adoption & Innovation Hub, Queensland, accessed 30 November 2024.

Tas Hub 2024, Supporting partnerships and collaboration: Outcomes and impact case study, internal report by the Tasmanian Drought Resilience Adoption & Innovation Hub, Tasmania. Unpublished

Thorne, S 2024, *Summary Review Report*, internal report by the Victorian Drought Resilience Adoption & Innovation Hub, Victoria. Unpublished

Vic Hub 2024, *Annual MEL Report 2023–24*, internal report by Victorian Drought Resilience Adoption & Innovation Hub, Victoria. Unpublished.

# Glossary

Term	Definition
ABARES	Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences
activity	Refers to the activity described in the grant agreement and includes the provisions of the Reporting Material and associated Activity Work Plan.
Activity Work Plan	A living document that describes each of the activities proposed by the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs in their individual grant agreement.
Adoption officer	Hub staff members that work with farmers and their communities to use relevant knowledge and tools to support innovative drought resilient practices.
Ag Vic	Agriculture Victoria
BLCC	Building Landcare Community and Capacity
co-design	A process to bring communities and stakeholders together to design products, services and policies.
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
COP	Community of practice
Core Hub Funding	Funding that the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs receive from the department to carry out basic functions and discrete projects delivered through the primary hubs grant agreement.
CRCs	Cooperative Research Centres
Cross Hub Projects	Projects that allow the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs to connect with each other and deliver on resilience to drought and climate change.
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DAF Qld	Department of Primary Industries - Queensland government
DPIRD	Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development - Western Australia government
Drought Plan	Australian Government Drought Plan (2024–2029)
DRRP Plan 2019	Drought Response, Resilience and Preparedness Plan
FBR	FDF Farm Business Resilience Program
FDF	Future Drought Fund
FDF Act	<i>Future Drought Fund Act 2019</i>
FDFCC	Future Drought Fund Consultative Committee
FTE	Full time equivalent
Funding Plan (2024–2028)	<i>Future Drought Fund (Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2024 to 2028) Determination 2024</i>
Funding Plan (2020–2024)	<i>Future Drought Fund (Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2020 to 2024) Determination 2020</i>
GGA	Grower Group Alliance
GPSA	Grain Producers South Australia

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Term	Definition
Grant agreement	A document detailing the agreement between the Commonwealth and the Grantee which sets out the relationship between the parties to the agreement and specifies the details of the grant.
Grant Opportunity Guidelines	A document that sets out information about a grant, including its purpose, outcomes and objectives, the application and assessment process, governance, and operation of the grant.
HAC	Hubs Advisory Committee
HIA	Horticulture Innovation Australia
Host organisation	Organisations that are responsible for the establishment, management and delivery of the hub, including implementing appropriate governance and administration arrangements.
Hub Director	Leadership role in the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs that effectively engage in the hub's activities, implement the hub's strategic direction and oversee the hub's reporting structures.
Hub Directors Steering Committee	A committee that supports the establishment and implementation of the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs strategic and operational requirements.
Hubs	The 8 Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs.
Hub program	The whole program, including Australian Government activities and the work of the 8 hubs.
IMC	Institutional Management Committee (South Australia Hub)
Investment Strategy	Future Drought Fund Investment Strategy (2024–2028)
JCU	James Cook University
Knowledge Broker	Hub staff that act as intermediaries, facilitating the flow of knowledge between groups. They may also bridge the gaps in industry and social structures enabling the translation and co-ordination of information across diverse communities.
LLS	Local Land Services – New South Wales government
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
Members	Any member of the Grantee's consortium who is approved by the Commonwealth under the grant agreement to assist the Grantee perform the Activity (Hub Members)
NAIPS	National Adoption and Innovation Policy Statement
NHT	National Heritage Trust
Node	In the hub-and-spoke model, a node refers to the peripheral entities connected to the central hub, which manage communication and project outputs and outcomes through the hub and by which the central hub itself, acts as the primary node coordinating all data or resource flow.
Northern WA and NT Hub	Northern Western Australia and Northern Territory Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub (Northern Hub)
NRE	Department of Natural Resources and Environment – Tasmania government
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NSW DPIRD	Department of Primary Industries – New South Wales government
Operational Plans	A document required under the grant agreement that describes the Research, Development, Extension, Adoption, & Commercialisation (RDEA&C) strategy of the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs.

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Term	Definition
Partners	Refers to any other third party (Network Partner) who receives a grant amount to perform a project, and/or is required to provide any other contributions, or any other in-kind or financial contribution greater than \$30,000), as part of the Activity in accordance with the grant agreement.
PPSA	Primary Producers South Australia
PIRSA	Primary Industries and Resources – South Australia government
priorities	Refers to the strategic outcomes as they relate to high-level policy, programs and the hub governance and operational plans.
Productivity Commission Inquiry	<i>Review of Part 3 of the Future Drought Fund Act Inquiry report</i> , released in September 2023 by the Productivity Commission
Progress reports	A 6-monthly report by each hub required under their individual grant agreement.
Projects	Refers to the discrete units of work that delivers on activity as presented in the operational plan and reported on in MEL reports
RAC	Regional Advisory Committee
R&D	Research and development
RDA&C	Research, development, adoption and commercialisation
RDEA&C	Research, development, extension, adoption and commercialisation
RDCs	Rural Research and Development Corporations
resilience	The ability to adapt, reorganise or transform in response to changing temperature, increasing variability and scarcity of rainfall and/or changed seasonality of rainfall, for improved economic, environmental and social resilience.
Review panel	Drought Hubs review panel
RSC	Regional Soil Coordinator
SA Hub	South Australian Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub
SAP	Selection Advisory Panel
SME	Small and medium enterprises
Southern NSW Hub	Southern New South Wales Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub
Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub	Southern Queensland and Northern New South Wales Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub
South-West WA Hub	South-West Western Australia Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub
Tas Hub	Tasmanian Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub (TAS Farm Innovation Hub)
The department	Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
Tropical North Qld Hub	Tropical North Queensland Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub (TNQ Drought Hub)
UJV	Unincorporated Joint Venture
UTAS	University of Tasmania
Vic Hub	Victoria Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub



# Appendix A: Review Terms of Reference

## Purpose

The review is to evaluate the performance of individual Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs (the Hubs) since their establishment, as well as the governance of the broader Hub program, and assess the appropriateness of the program into the future.

## Context

The Australian Government is committed to enhance the public good through building drought resilience in Australia's agricultural sector, the agricultural landscape, and communities through the Future Drought Fund (FDF). The Hubs are one of 15 current FDF programs that work with farmers and their communities to prepare for drought.

In 2021 the Australian Government established eight Hubs to bring together farmers, industry, agribusinesses, Natural Resource Management practitioners and communities to connect drought resilience expertise and contribute to the design of innovative technologies and practices.

The Hubs key function is to provide regionally focused support to develop, extend and encourage the adoption of drought resilient technologies and practices. Each of the Hubs span different agricultural regions and use co-design to guide the projects they deliver; resulting in varied operating models and governance arrangements accommodating the unique needs and opportunities of each region.

On 26 September 2023, the Productivity Commission (PC) presented their Inquiry Report on the FDF. The PC Inquiry's Recommendation 7.4 identified: *'Funding for the ... [Hubs] should be extended for two years in the next funding plan period, with continued funding for each Hub depending on a satisfactory mid-term performance review... the Department ... should also release a public statement of expectations'*. In response, in October 2023, the Australian Government announced a total of \$2.91 million to evaluate key programs, including the Hubs, and in May 2024, \$28 million was announced for the Hubs to continue on-ground activity over 2 years from 2024–25 while the review is undertaken. The review will inform any longer-term opportunity, with \$104 million over years 6 from 2026–27 available.

The government intends that over time the FDF, and its' related programs, will continue to mature and build in capability in supporting drought resilience. A new Statement of Expectations will be proposed for the program moving forward as part of this review.

## Scope of the review

The review will evaluate the efficiency, and effectiveness of each Hub's performance since their establishment, as well as the governance of the broader Hub program, including:

- the extent to which each individual Hub meets the expectations of their contract, the intended outcomes of the MEL Framework, and the objective of the FDF Act 2019 ‘to enhance the public good by building drought resilience’
- existing governance, administration, operations and delivery structures (both of the Hubs and government agencies). This could include:
  - reporting on activities – including consistency of reporting across Hubs, and how reporting reflects the activities on the ground.
  - governance committees – including the role of the Drought Hubs Directors Steering Committee, the Hubs Advisory Committee, the FDF Consultative Committee and the department in providing appropriate oversight of the Hubs.
- assess the appropriateness of the Drought Hub Program into the future, and recommend a new statement of expectations, with consideration of:
  - the key issues raised by the PC in the Inquiry and prior FDF consultation
  - how the hubs interact with other FDF programs (e.g. their role in administering FDF grants, or as delivery partners)
  - the hubs performance in driving a step change in the application of effective drought resilience practices and technologies
  - a new statement of expectations, with consideration for the role and purpose of the new program, and related funding model.

The evaluation and assessment aspects of the review can occur concurrently or in sequence depending on the capacity of the project team. The review will consider the stakeholder feedback gathered through the PC Inquiry and prior public engagement in contextualising the efforts. The review will further source and analyse information from existing reporting and documentation, and through engagement with relevant stakeholders.

## Out of scope

This review will not:

- Re-prosecute the 2020 / 2021 decision to create Drought Hubs or alternative drought related uses for these funds, or
- Duplicate the development of a new FDF Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework.

## Process

- The review will appoint an eminent Review Chair and Evaluation Expert to provide independent governance, oversight, rigour, and technical expertise to the review. External consultancies may also be engaged to provide supplementary support.
- The review will include desktop research, analysis, and targeted consultation within DAFF, across the current Drought Hubs (including their nodes) and related stakeholders.
- The review will recommend a new Statement of Expectations in shaping the role of a future program.

## Deliverables

- A Final Evaluation report will be delivered by the end of 2024, and the Final Report (including a recommended new statement of expectations) will be delivered in early 2025.

# Appendix B: Data collection and methodology

A range of data was collected to help inform the review. Due to a reliance on qualitative data through interviews and written submissions, the evaluation sought to develop a standardised methodology to ask consistent questions and guide discussions. The following document outlines the key questions that were asked during the initial investigation of the hubs and the hub program. This is followed by questions for the hubs executive team and staff and follow up queries. Finally, it outlines the questions that were asked during targeted consultations with key stakeholders.

## Lines of inquiry for evaluation

Key questions were developed at the start of the evaluation to help fully investigate the effectiveness and efficiency of the hubs and hub program (Table B1). These questions were addressed through the desktop review, targeted meetings and discussions, and other data collection activities.

**Table B1 Key questions and considerations**

Category	Key questions and sub-questions	Considerations regarding what to look for
Hub performance evaluation	What is the hub delivering? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What priorities has the hub taken, and why were these selected?</li> <li>What projects is the hub delivering?</li> <li>What cross-hub projects is the hub delivering and what is the role of the hub?</li> <li>What else is the hub doing?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The rationale and approach to the hub's chosen suite of activities.</li> <li>Match between actual activities and contract requirements/directions.</li> </ul>
	What is the hub's implementation approach? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the hub's delivery model (broadly)?</li> <li>What is the hub's governance model?</li> <li>What is the hub's staffing model?</li> <li>What else has been put in place to support the hub's implementation?</li> <li>How does the hub measure and report on its performance, and performance of other organisations involved in hub activities?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adequacy of hub governance and oversight.</li> <li>Adequacy of measurement and monitoring activity.</li> <li>Engagement models with delivery partners (nodes, partners, etc.), including rationale for selected approaches.</li> </ul>
	How has the hub engaged the sector and community? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the hub's community engagement approach (broadly)?</li> <li>How did the hub conduct co-design activities? What did this reveal about priorities for the hub?</li> <li>What was the reach of the hub's activities across the sector and community?</li> <li>How do hubs collect and use feedback from the sector and community?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approach and feedback loops with the agriculture and innovation sector.</li> <li>Approach and feedback loops with the on-ground community that hubs are seeking to support.</li> </ul>

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Key questions and sub-questions	Considerations regarding what to look for
	<p>How well has the hub operated (efficiency)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human resources: were hubs adequately resourced to deliver on expectations?</li> <li>Staffing: how did the staffing model help or hinder implementation?</li> <li>Financial: how much has been spent, and where, to implement hub activities?</li> <li>Financial: what co-contributions have supported the hub's delivery? Were these financial, in-kind or other?</li> <li>Administration: Were suitable administrative processes and systems in place to support the hub?</li> <li>Measurement: Were monitoring processes suitable to understand outputs and outcomes?</li> <li>Reporting: How adequate were reporting processes?</li> <li>Projects: Has the delivery process for hub projects been efficient?</li> <li>DAFF: How has your engagement with the Department supported or hindered implementation activity?</li> <li>Governance: How have broader governance structures supported or hindered implementation activity?</li> <li>Other: What other factors have impacted on the efficient delivery of hub activities?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hub reflections on the selected delivery structures and models used for implementation.</li> <li>Generate information compare and contrast the implementation approaches across hubs</li> </ul>
	<p>What has the hub achieved (effectiveness)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What outcomes has the hub sought to achieve? What evidence exists in relation to achievement of these outcomes?</li> <li>What activities have worked best? Why?</li> <li>What activities have been less effective? Why?</li> <li>What evidence of change exists in relation to drought resilience?</li> <li>What evidence of change exists in relation to any other outcomes being pursued by the hub?</li> <li>Were there other unintended outcomes as a result of the hub? What are these?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflections on achievements, and datasets to support claims.</li> <li>Achievements across the sector and at the community level, particularly evidence of changes to drought preparedness.</li> <li>Reflections on successes and areas for enhancement to achieve outcomes</li> </ul>

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Key questions and sub-questions	Considerations regarding what to look for
	<p>Future directions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is known about the scale, distribution and magnitude of needs amongst the community? Has this changed since the commencement of the hubs?</li> <li>What are the priority needs across your hub's region to prepare effectively for future drought?</li> <li>Which hub activities should cease, continue or expand to target effort in future?</li> <li>What role should related programs play, relative to hubs?</li> <li>What could be improved about the operations of this hub?</li> <li>What could be improved about the operations of the hub program as a whole?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow for reflections on next steps for each individual hub and the hub model more broadly.</li> <li>Evidence of continued and ongoing needs on-ground.</li> </ul>
Hub program governance evaluation	<p>How effective are the hub program's governance arrangements?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What governance supports are in place to oversee and support the hub program's implementation? How effective are these?</li> <li>Who is responsible for decision-making and leadership in relation to the hub program?</li> <li>How do the hub program's governance and decision-making structures support the FDF more broadly?</li> <li>How do governance structures for the hub program intersect with governance arrangements of individual hubs?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of suitable governance arrangements at different levels, including up to FDF and intersecting with hubs.</li> </ul>
	<p>How effective are the hub program's operational supports?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What has DAFF put in place to oversee and support the hub program's implementation?</li> <li>What hub program supports are available for each hub to access (e.g. IT and other forms of assistance across the hub program)?</li> <li>What Hub Program staffing is in place? How do hub program staff intersect with the staffing profile at individual hubs?</li> <li>How are risks identified and managed across the hub program?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of appropriate central support for the hub program, including systems, staff and risk management.</li> </ul>
	<p>How effectively are stakeholder supported across the hub program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What model for stakeholder engagement is in place across the hub program?</li> <li>What is communicated with different stakeholder groups across the hub program? When and how is this done?</li> <li>What could be improved in relation to stakeholder engagement across the hub program?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular communications with stakeholders at different levels.</li> <li>Information support for Individual hubs and related stakeholders.</li> </ul>

Category	Key questions and sub-questions	Considerations regarding what to look for
	<p>How effectively are finances managed across the hub program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much funding has been allocated to the hub program? How has it been distributed?</li> <li>• How efficient and effective have the models of distribution been across the hub program?</li> <li>• How is the financial status across the hub program monitored?</li> <li>• What is in place to support financial management by individual hubs? How is funding acquitted?</li> <li>• What risks exist in relation to financial management across the hub program, or among individual hubs?</li> <li>• What could be improved in relation to financial management?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of sound financial management and assurance.</li> </ul>
	<p>How effective is the measurement and reporting approach across the hub program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the program logic for the hub program? How does this feed into the goals of the FDF and related government priorities?</li> <li>• What is monitored across the hub program? How is monitoring information used?</li> <li>• How does the hub program measure and report on its performance? Are there indicators and targets in place?</li> <li>• How could the hub program improve its monitoring and reporting processes and effectiveness?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of sound monitoring and reporting practices.</li> </ul>

## Engagement with hubs executive team and staff

### 1) Virtual interview questions

Standardised questions were used by the review panel to guide initial discussions with hub executive and staff. Initial meetings were held online with all hubs throughout September and October 2024.

#### Life before the hub

- What was known about the regional needs at the time the hub was introduced?
- What your organisation's role in drought resilience before the hub commenced?
- What networks existed (and potentially still exist) prior to the hub's commencement?

#### Hub co-design and priority setting

- What was your approach to the initial co-design process to identify needs across your region?
- Did this initial co-design translate/influence the hub's priorities?
- How else does the hub set and refine its priorities: e.g. by sector, by geography, by node/partner, by need.

#### Areas of focus and value proposition

- Does your hub focus solely on drought resilience?
- What other areas of focus does your hub focus on?
- What do you see as the main value proposition of the hub?

#### Implementation approach

- What is the hub's delivery model (broadly)?
- What is the hub's governance model?
- What is the hub's staffing model?
- What else has been put in place to support the hub's implementation?

#### Engagement approach

- What is the hub's community engagement approach? What has been learned from the approach taken?
- How do hubs work with producers?
- How do hubs work with First Nations communities?
- How do hubs work with State and Territory bodies
- How do hubs work with other organisations operating in the sector?
- How do you measure the strength of the hub's relationships?
- Do you think the hubs are recognised as Commonwealth Government drought resilience bodies?
- How do hubs collect and use feedback they receive from the sector and community?
- What do you see as the value of the network that has been established via the hub?

#### Hub operations (reflection on the model)

- Human resources: were hubs adequately resourced to deliver on expectations?
- Decision-making: how does the hub make decisions on priorities, activities and plans to address needs?
- Staffing: how did the staffing model help or hinder implementation?
- Financial: how much has been spent, and where, to implement hub activities?
- Financial: what co-contributions have supported the hub's delivery? Were these financial, in-kind or other? How have co-contributions influenced what you do?
- Administration: Were suitable administrative processes and systems in place to support the hub?
- Measurement: Were monitoring processes suitable to understand outputs and outcomes?
- Reporting: How adequate were reporting processes?
- Projects: Has the delivery process for hub projects been efficient?



- DAFF: How has your engagement with the Department supported or hindered implementation activity?
- Governance: How have broader hub Program governance structures supported or hindered implementation activity?
- Other: What other factors have impacted on the efficient delivery of hub activities?

## 2) Follow-up survey questions

The review panel asked hubs to respond to a set of survey questions to better understand their current role, decision making processes, and operations. Requests were sent to hubs in December 2024 and were received by 23 January 2025.

### Section 1: Role and audience

- Please outline the role(s) that the hub has sought to play since establishment.
- Who does the hub see as its target audience(s)?
- Does your hub seek to directly or indirectly communicate with your audience?

### Section 2: Decision making within hubs

- Please outline the governance arrangements for the hub, as they presently stand
- How does the hub make final decisions about which projects to support?
- Please explain the decision-making and approvals processes for the selection of people into roles on the hub board/steering committee and related governance bodies described in Question 1
- Please outline the process for employing hub staff
- Please outline the hub's process for agreeing and signing hub subcontracts
- Identify types of subcontractors who have autonomy to approve spending of hub funds
- Who has the delegations to approve formal communications sent from the hub (including website, newsletters etc)?
- Please explain how the hub oversees the decision-making processes for hub activities by nodes or partners?
- Across the hub, are processes to approve spending and project priorities by each node/partner consistent? If not, how do they differ, and why?

### Section 3: Hub operations

- Please outline the hub's approach to risk management, across the hub as a whole.
- Please outline the hub's approach to managing equity and fairness in the procurement of projects or services.
- Please outline the hub's approach to managing conflicts of interest, across the entire hub.
- Please outline the hub's approach to the management of private or confidential information.

- Please outline what reports are sought by hubs, nodes/partners in relation to projects or services delivered. What has worked well in reporting? What issues have been encountered?
- Please provide any further information you would like to share on matters raised in this survey.

### 3) Follow-up staffing request

The review panel also asked each hub to provide a detailed account of hub staffing, including role, FTE, locations, and funding arrangements of positions. Requests were sent to hubs in December 2024 and were received by January 2025.

### 4) Face-to-face interview questions

The review panel has face-to-face meetings with all hubs and their boards or steering committees throughout January and February 2025. During these visits, the review panel met with other stakeholders including hub staff, partners, state governments and nodes. The review panel provided an overview of the evaluation finding and asked follow-up questions.

Questions for the hub board or committee:

- Can you tell us a bit about the role of the board in making decisions?
- What kinds of reporting from delivery partners does the hub provide to you as a board?
- What kind of decisions do you make as a board? What kind of oversight does the board have on hub activities and the progress of delivery?

Other questions for all stakeholders:

Role/function

- Discussion on role of the hubs (RDEA&C), challenges and opportunities.
- What would be lost if the role of hubs was clarified to focus on extension and adoption?
- In drought role and climate change adaptation
- What role should the hub have during drought? (discussion)
- Does the hub have any views on reducing the emphasis on drought, and re-focusing on innovation, risk management and general climate resilience?

Governance

- From the hub's perspective, what governance arrangements are working well? What is not?
- Where does the practical authority reside for hub operations? (Director, Board etc.)

Accountability

- Current accountability and reporting mechanisms appear to require improvements to increase effectiveness and limit resource burdens.
- What would a more efficient and less resource demanding reporting system look like?
- The delivery model, financial management, not set up to be efficient.

- The current model requires the hubs to subcontract to ‘partners’ and others for the provision of services. There are in excess of 240 subcontracts in place.
- How could depth and breadth of influence be increased?
- How would a smaller number of larger scale projects over longer time frames be developed?
- How can the hub reduce administrative overheads?

#### Dispersed place-based operations

- The hub program was aiming to move the provision of Commonwealth funded services closer to local communities.
- Is the hubs geographic coverage working? and at what cost?
- Are there opportunities for stronger arrangements with other organisations (NRMs, state and territory governments) already on the ground?

#### Geographical structure and coverage

- The current distribution of the hub network is based on climatic variation, not aligned with state and territory borders.
- How do we make the most of the limited program funding and the enormous coverage expected of the hubs?

#### Identity/branding

- Current identity and branding across the hub network vary and could be enhanced. It is often unclear that hubs are a Commonwealth funded program.
- How do the hubs project a clear identity to their intended client base?
- What connection is there between that identity and the Commonwealth as the primary funding source?
- What connections have developed between the hubs and the broader FDF programs?  
Engagement with targeted stakeholders?

The review panel conducted online discussions with a range of hub affiliated organisations and other stakeholders (see [Appendix C](#) for a full list). Standardised questions were used by the review panel to guide discussions.

#### Life before the hub

- What was known about regional needs at the time the hubs were introduced?
- What your organisation’s role in drought resilience before the hub commenced? Has this role changed since this time?
- What networks existed prior to the hub’s commencement? Do these still exist?
- How have the hubs integrated into this network, what works well?

#### Value proposition

- What do you see as the main value proposition of the hub?

- Do you see the hubs as Commonwealth Government drought resilience bodies?
- Implementation approach
- What has worked best in relation to implementation by the hub/s?
- What has not worked well in relation implementation by the hub/s?
- What concerns do you have about the hub model/implementation program?
- Are there areas of duplication in the extension space? Are there any gaps?
- Are there other unintended outcomes as a result of the hub? What are these?

#### Engagement approach

Are you satisfied with...

- How the hubs work with producers?
- How the hubs work with First Nations communities?
- How the hubs work with State and Territory departments/bodies/agencies?
- How the hubs work with other organisations across the sector?
- What are your reflections on the strength of the hub's relationships?
- What do you see as the value of the network that has been established via the hub?
- Describe your input, if any, into the design of hubs and ongoing engagement? How does your engagement differ between different hubs?

#### Hub achievements

- What have the hub/s achieved?
- What unintended outcomes arose as a result of the hubs?
- What activities do you think have worked best? Why?
- What activities have been less effective? Why?
- Is there any evidence of change in relation to drought resilience?
- What evidence of change exists in relation to any other outcomes being pursued by the hub?
- Stakeholder views in line with our areas of inquiry.
- Stakeholder reflections on the hub's positioning and work over the past few years.

## Appendix C: Stakeholders

The review panel consulted 68 stakeholders as part of the review. Key questions were developed at the start of the evaluation to help fully investigate the effectiveness and efficiency of the hubs and hub program (see [Appendix B](#) for an overview of these questions). These were addressed through a desktop review, targeted meetings and discussions, and other data collection activities prior to engaging with stakeholders. Stakeholder engagement initially focused on answering the evaluation questions and filling gaps in information. The review panel met with hubs and their committees or boards and provided an overview of the evaluation findings and asked follow-up questions based on previous stakeholder consultations.

Date (month/year)	Stakeholder group	Stakeholders	Meeting type
August, September, October, November 2024, February, March 2025	Farm Resilience Division executive	Farm Resilience Division executive	Face-to-face and online consultation meetings
August-September 2024	Hubs	Northern WA and NT Hub SA Hub South-West WA Hub Southern NSW Hub Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub Tas Hub Tropical North Qld Hub Vic Hub	Online consultation meetings
September, October, November 2024	Future Drought Fund staff	Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Management section FDF First Nations Partnerships section FDF Program Evaluation and Support section Governance and Committee Secretariat section Innovation and Communities section State and Territory Government Partnership and Programs section Drought Partnerships section	Online consultation meetings
September-October 2024	Department staff (outside Future Drought Fund)	First Nations branch, Agricultural Policy division National Heritage Trust section, Sustainable Agriculture branch, Sustainability, Climate and Strategy division	Online consultation meetings
September 2024	Agriculture Ministers' Meeting (AMM) Working Group on Drought	Agriculture Ministers' Meeting (AMM) Working Group on Drought	Face-to-face meeting
September 2024	First Nations representative and organisations	Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation Josh Gilbert, Future Drought Fund Consultative Committee member	Online consultation meetings

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Date (month/year)	Stakeholder group	Stakeholders	Meeting type
September-October 2024	State and territory governments	<p>Agriculture Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Northern Territory Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Tasmania</p> <p>Department of Primary Industries and Regions, South Australia Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development New South Wales, Local Land Services, New South Wales Primary Industries Development, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Western Australia</p>	Online consultation meetings
October 2024	Farming advocacy	Farmers for Climate Action	Online consultation meetings
October 2024	Natural Resource Management organisations	Natural Resource Management Regions Australia	Online consultation meetings
October 2024	Research organisations	CSIRO Agriculture and Food, CSIRO Drought Resilience Mission	Online consultation meetings
October 2024	Industry Representative Bodies	<p>National Farmers' Federation Economic Policy and Farm Business Committee Australian Chicken Meat Federation Australian Lot Feeders Association Egg Farmers of Australia New South Wales Farmers Queensland Farmer's Federation</p>	Online consultation meetings
October 2024	Rural Research and Development Corporations	<p>Council of Rural Research and Development Corporations Australian Pork Limited</p>	Online consultation meetings
November 2024, February 2025	FDF governance bodies	FDF Consultative Committee Hubs Advisory Committee	Face-to-face and online consultation meetings
December 2025	Australian Government	Office of Northern Australia	Online consultation meeting

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Date (month/year)	Stakeholder group	Stakeholders	Meeting type
January, February 2025	Hubs and their boards or committees	<p>Northern WA and NT Hub, Governing Board</p> <p>SA Hub, Institutional Management Committee and SA FDF Advisory Board</p> <p>Southern NSW Hub, Innovation Hub Board</p> <p>Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub, Hub Partners and Hub Node Staff</p> <p>South-West WA Hub, Wickepin and Albany Nodes, The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development WA, and the Centre for Crop Disease Management</p> <p>Tas Hub, Industry Advisory Board, Department of Natural Resources and Environment</p> <p>Tropical North Qld Hub, Steering Committee, Director of the Cairns Institute Stewart Lockie</p> <p>Vic Hub, Investment Oversight Committee, Farming Systems CEOs and Chairs</p>	Face-to-face meetings
February 2025	Hubs	Northern WA and NT Hub (hub staff)	Online consultation meeting
March 2025	First Nations organisation	First Nations Advisory group members	Online consultation meeting

# Appendix D: Have Your Say process

## Submissions received

The review panel received 29 written submissions to the review's public consultation. This included feedback from hubs, host organisations, hub members and partners, state and national industry representative bodies, Rural Research and Development Corporations, state governments, and producers.

Of the 29 submissions received, 23 responses were published online as 4 were submitted in confidence and 2 were deemed out of scope for this review. The public submissions include:

- Ag Excellence Alliance
- Australian Pork Limited
- Charles Sturt University
- Council of Rural Research and Development Corporations
- Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania
- Don Pratley
- Farmers for Climate Action
- Goulburn Broken CMA
- Grower Group Alliance
- Landscape Boards of SA
- Livestock SA
- Mallee Regional Innovation Centre
- Mallee Sustainable Farming
- National Farmers Federation
- National Feral Pig Management Coordinator
- NSW Farmers Association
- Southern Qld Northern NSW Innovation Hub
- Tasmanian institute of Agriculture
- Tropical North Qld Drought Hub
- University of Adelaide

## Issues paper

The review panel prepared a list of questions outlined in an issues paper to help stakeholders make their submission. These questions are listed as following:

### Hub performance in your region



- What do you see as the hub's role?
- How would you describe the local or regional awareness of the hub?
- What have been the main benefits of the hub?
- What challenges has the hub experienced?
- How effectively has the hub worked with other agencies and organisations?
- How does the hub engage with producers? How effective is this?
- How does the hub engage with First Nations people? How effective is this?
- What are the most important skills and capacities the hubs require for success in advancing regional drought resilience?
- How effectively do the hubs collaborate with each other to share products, information and knowledge?
- How effective has the hub been in building drought resilience across your region?
- Which factors do you think most improve drought resilience? For example, changed practices, or investments in new infrastructure, equipment and technology.
- How has the hub focused on these factors to achieve effective change in your region?

#### **FDF drought hub program**

If your organisation interacts with the hub program as a whole, you may wish to consider the following questions:

- Which gaps in drought resilience services have the hub program helped to fill?
- Has the hub program duplicated other available services or supports? If so, how?
- How effective has the governance and management of the hub program been?
- How effective has the hub program been in building drought resilience across regional Australia?
- How effective has the hub program been in building drought resilience across sections or cohorts in regional communities?

#### **Future enhancements**

- How could the hub program be enhanced?
- How could the hub program work more effectively with other government programs, including the FDF? A list of FDF programs can be found at Appendix B, and further information is available on the department's website.
- What support should the hub program provide to help producers prepare for and recover from drought?
- Should the hub program support drought response and, if so, what form could that take?

- The PC Inquiry recommended the FDF and hub program encompass climate change adaptation needs. This might include adapting to higher temperatures and changed rainfall patterns in some regions but exclude natural disasters such as floods and bushfires. How could the hubs best promote climate resilience in addition to drought resilience?
- Is there value in retaining a flexible local approach to hubs activities across each region, or:
- Should greater nationally consistency be sought?
- Would more consistency across hubs be desirable for some hub functions but not others?

## Appendix E: Hub entity summary

The Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs grant agreements with the Australian Government includes the details of their legal grantee name, status and entity type. Errors or omissions in the documentation are a direct reflection of the information provided in the hub grant agreements.

Hub	Full legal name of Grantee	Legal entity type	Hub entity
SA Hub	The University of Adelaide	A body corporate in accordance with section 4 of the <i>University of Adelaide Act 1971 (SA)</i>	Not specified in grant agreement
Northern WA and NT Hub	Charles Darwin University	Non-corporate State or Territory Entity, <i>Charles Darwin University Act 2003 (NT)</i>	The Northern WA/NT Hub is established as an Unincorporated Joint Venture (UJV) entity.
Southern NSW Hub	Charles Sturt University	Corporate State or Territory Entity, pursuant to the provisions of the <i>Charles Sturt University Act 1989 No 76</i>	A contract of collaboration (unincorporated joint venture) among Consortium Partners establishes the Board's structure and its operations.
Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub	University of Southern Queensland	Other corporate entity, established pursuant to the provisions of the <i>University of Southern Queensland Act 1998</i>	Not specified in grant agreement
South-West WA Hub	Grower Group Alliance Inc	Other Incorporated Entity	Partnership agreement formalised with agreed consortium participants (unincorporated joint venture)
Tas Hub	University of Tasmania	Corporate State or Territory Entity, continued under the <i>University of Tasmania Act (1992)</i>	An unincorporated entity governed by a Board who acts as a Steering Committee
Tropical North Qld Hub	James Cook University	Other Incorporated Entity, established pursuant to the provisions of the <i>James Cook University Act (1997)</i>	Not specified in grant agreement
Vic Hub	University of Melbourne	Other Incorporated Entity, established pursuant to the provisions of the <i>University of Melbourne Act 2009 (Vic)</i>	Not specified in grant agreement

## Appendix F: Cross-hub projects

Project	Lead	Participating Hubs	Description
Project 1: Managing Rangelands for Drought Resilience	Northern WA and NT Hub	SA Hub, Southern NSW Hub, Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub, South-West WA Hub, Tropical North Qld Hub	This project showcased technologies and techniques that use mapping to improve rangeland management. The use of management strategies and technology will assist rangelands producers to improve grazing management, pasture regeneration and water use efficiency and thus become more resilient to drought. Twelve demonstration sites were established and a range of extension activities delivered to showcase technologies and techniques that use mapping and other technologies at the property scale to improve grazing management. Each site was analysed using property use and land condition tools to improve rangeland management and support producers in becoming more resilient to drought.
Project 2: Modern Soil Moisture Monitoring to Improve Irrigation	South-West WA Hub	Northern WA and NT Hub and Vic Hub	This project aimed to improve drought resilience in irrigated horticulture. 31 on-farm demonstration sites were established at grower properties across southern Western Australia, Northern Territory and Victoria. Soil moisture monitoring technologies were installed at the sites, and irrigation development officers supported growers to learn, use and adopt the technology and build their capacity to strategically implement soil moisture monitoring and irrigation management.
Project 3: Drought Management for the Health and Longevity of Perennial Horticulture Plants	SA Hub	Vic Hub, Southern NSW Hub and Tas Hub	<p>This project aimed to boost drought preparedness and resilience capabilities of horticultural farmers and rural communities engaged in wine grape, almond and citrus production value chains across South Australia, southern New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. The project delivered 21 demonstration sites. These sites integrated remotely monitored climate, soil moisture and canopy growth data to support irrigation management decision-making for increased water-use efficiency.</p> <p>Different approaches were taken by each of the 4 collaborating hubs, with a focus on coordination of the technology demonstration and validation by the SA Hub, obtaining deep insights and documentation of the irrigation behaviours by the Tas Hub, and educational workshops and extension activities by the Southern NSW and Vic Hubs.</p>
Project 4: Fast tracking WA and NT to align with nutritional feed base mapping technology advancements at a national level	Northern WA and NT Hub	South-West WA Hub	This project trialled and calibrated on-farm/station dynamic feed base mapping technology in the pastoral industry in remote Western Australia and Northern Territory. It established and refined a system for remote parts of Australia allowing pastoralists to manage grazing pressure and better prepare properties for changing climatic conditions.
Project 7: Drought Resilience Practices in	Vic Hub	SA Hub and Tas Hub	The project supported cropping and livestock farmers across Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania in managing pastures and use of livestock

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Project	Lead	Participating Hubs	Description
Mixed Farming Systems			<p>containment and feeding systems for drought resilience. It did this by increasing awareness, knowledge and understanding of best practice containment systems, developing a decision matrix to support the decision-making process based on locally relevant trigger points, and trialling drought tolerant crop rotation options.</p> <p>Four broad areas of activity were conducted around encouraging the use of containment feeding.</p> <p>Activity 1: Most appropriate containment feeding approaches</p> <p>Activity 2: Trigger points to make decisions</p> <p>Activity 3: Real time information and tools</p> <p>Activity 4: More drought tolerant rotation options</p>

# Appendix G: Hubs Advisory Committee Terms of Reference

## Purpose

Through the Future Drought Fund, the Australian Government is supporting 8 regionally focused Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs (Hubs). The Hubs have a mission to deliver drought resilience research, development, extension, adoption, and commercialisation support responsive to the needs, priorities, and opportunities of Australia's key agricultural and climatic zones.

The role of the Advisory Committee is to provide advice on the Hubs' strategic objectives and program delivery and implementation to the Minister, the department, and the Hubs. This will ensure the regionally focused Hubs are well placed to deliver drought resilience outcomes and remain connected to national priorities.

## Scope

The committee will provide advice on the strategic objectives and management of the Hubs. This will include advice on project delivery, staffing, community engagement, financial management and partnerships. The committee will also provide input on relevant Future Drought Fund strategic documents, program evaluations and reviews.

The department will provide the committee with 6-monthly Hub activity reporting, as well as opportunities to meet with Hub Directors to discuss challenges and achievements.

## Roles and responsibilities

- 1) Provide advice to the department and individual Hubs on Hub performance and delivery, including financial and strategic risk management.
- 2) Provide advice to the Minister on the performance of the Hubs, as appropriate.
- 3) Where requested, provide input to FDF strategic documents, program evaluations and reviews. This could include the Future Drought Fund Investment Strategy 2024–2028, and the 2024 review of the Hubs.
- 4) Provide information and advice on relevant national and regional initiatives, priorities and advances relevant to drought resilience and the objectives and activities of the Hubs.
- 5) Provide feedback received from key stakeholders on the performance of the Hubs and opportunities to connect and partner.
- 6) Provide strategic advice on ways the Hubs can encourage innovation and transformational change within the agricultural sector, including better engagement with First Nations people and community engagement, knowledge sharing, adoption, commercialisation, investment, and partnerships.

## Membership

The committee consists of a Chair and up to 6 other members appointed by the Minister for Agriculture.

The term of appointment ends on 30 June 2025.

Committee members will have experience that covers the broad range of skills and experience relevant to the work of the Hubs. This includes expertise in agriculture, the university sector, drought resilience, natural resource management, First Nations engagement, extension and adoption, innovation, and public sector management.

## Business of the committee

The committee will meet approximately 6 times per year. Business of the committee between meetings will be managed by electronic correspondence. Most meetings will be held online. In person meetings may be held where the budget permits.

## Conflict of interest

Members of the committee must not be involved in the leadership or governance of a Hub.

All members will be required to continuously disclose any interests that may conflict with their role as a member of the committee.

A probity advisor will be provided by the department to support the declaration and management of conflicts.

Where an actual or potential conflict arises, the probity advisor will recommend an appropriate management strategy for decision by the Chair, or if the conflict relates to the Chair, by the other members of the committee.

A probity plan and protocols developed by the probity advisor will provide detailed governance of conflict and other probity considerations.

## Reporting

The committee will provide a written report to the Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management on key issues six monthly or as required.

## Remuneration

Members of the committee will be remunerated sitting fees for attendance at meetings and reasonable travel costs as determined by the Remuneration Tribunal.

## Administrative support

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry provides administrative and secretariat support and will be the central point of contact for all committee related issues and queries.

# Appendix H: Hubs Directors Steering Committee Terms of Reference

## Purpose

Through the Future Drought Fund, the Australian Government is supporting eight regionally focused Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs (Hubs). The Hubs have a mission to deliver drought resilience research, development, extension, adoption and commercialisation support responsive to the needs, priorities and opportunities of Australia's key agricultural and climatic zones.

The role of the Hub Directors Steering Committee is to support the establishment and implementation and delivery of the strategic priorities of the Hubs.

## Roles and responsibilities

The Committee will be responsible for implementing the Hub strategic and operational requirements. Roles and responsibilities include:

- 1) Overseeing the initial establishment of Hubs and establishing joint strategic directions where appropriate;
- 2) Providing progress reports on Hub implementation and contractual obligations related to the Hubs;
- 3) Identifying opportunities for Hubs to progress work jointly and maximise the long-term benefits of the Hubs;
- 4) Provide oversight to the Knowledge Broker Community of Practice and other networks established to support connection of Hubs to each other, the department and other relevant programs; and,
- 5) Responding to requests for information and advice from the Drought Minister and the Hubs Advisory Committee.

## Membership

The Committee consists of a representative from the department as Chair and each of the Hub Directors.

## Meetings

The Committee will meet approximately six times per year. Business of the Committee will be managed by electronic correspondence and virtual meetings. Face-to-face meetings can be arranged where there are opportunities.

## Reporting

The Committee will report to the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Advisory Committee.



# Appendix I: Hub summaries

## Northern WA and NT Hub

Category	Notes
Vision	Empowering regional communities in northern WA and the NT to build resilience to drought, biodiversity loss, and climate change. Through collaboration, innovation, and research the hub drives drought preparedness, and sustainable practices, supporting ecosystems, economies and thriving communities.
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the uptake of drought resilience practices and technologies that will reduce exposure to drought risks, and therefore improve economic, environmental, and social resilience to drought.</li> <li>• Implement a delivery model that is place-based, informed by co-design and participatory approaches, and focused on practical application of research that can drive a step change in the application of effective drought resilience practices and technologies.</li> </ul>
Host organisation	Charles Darwin University (CDU)
Hub name and website	Northern Hub <a href="https://northernhub.au">https://northernhub.au</a>
Structure	The hub is an unincorporated joint venture within CDU. The hub is currently undertaking a full restructure of the hub's node network to ensure greater uptake, reach and impact within the region.
Delivery model	<p>The hub is a consortium of 9 core member organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CDU</li> <li>• Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association (NTCA)</li> <li>• Kimberley Pilbara Cattlemen's Association (KPCA)</li> <li>• Rangelands NRM</li> <li>• Territory NRM</li> <li>• NT Farmers</li> <li>• Regional Development Australia (RDA) Pilbara</li> <li>• NT Government</li> <li>• WA Government</li> </ul>
Members and partners	9 members and 13 network partners were identified in the hub's initial grant agreement with no change as of June 2024. The hub has identified 169 formal and informal collaborations with organisations across projects and activities.
Context	The hub's region accounts for over a third of land mass of Australia. It encompasses diverse landscapes across northern WA and the NT that include the vast desert rangelands, sub-tropical savannah grasslands, monsoonal tropics and coastal floodplains and estuaries. It is home to some of the most remote and socio-economically vulnerable communities in Australia and supports agro-industries that are challenged by vast distances, harsh climate, poor infrastructure, and limited-service delivery. Key industries in the operational area for the hub include pastoral (predominantly beef), fisheries and aquaculture, horticulture, Indigenous production, field crops and forestry.
Hub locations and geographical coverage	<p>Hub operations are based in Darwin within CDU. On commencement there were 7 nodes but this approach is under review. The potential new node locations are:</p> <p>Darwin and surrounds</p> <p>Central Australia and the Barkly/Alice Springs</p> <p>East Kimberley/Kununurra</p> <p>West Kimberley/Broome</p> <p>Pilbara/Karratha</p> <p>Gascoyne/Carnarvon</p>

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes	
	New nodes may be located in industry bodies, NRM Groups, state government and local community organisations.	
Staffing	<p>8 hub staff members with a total of 8.0 FTE. Nodes will be staffed with a minimum of 0.2 FTE per location. The hub roles are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hub Director</li> <li>• Hub Manager</li> <li>• Finance Manger</li> <li>• Knowledge Broker (Innovation)</li> <li>• Senior Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Officer</li> <li>• Aboriginal Engagement and Program Coordinator</li> <li>• Node Manager/Adoption Office (x5)</li> </ul>	
Governance	<p>A governing board with an independent chair is responsible for oversight of hub operations, approval for financial transactions, strategic direction and corporate governance oversight of the hub.</p> <p>The hub's board is comprised of industry organisations, inland management, CDU, WA and NT governments. The hub also has an audit and risk committee and steering committees that support the hub's five pillars: First Nations, Human Capacity, Resilient Landscapes, Natural Capital, Preparation and Planning.</p>	
Core hub funding	<b>Hubs have been provided with core hub funding up to June 2026:</b>	
	Core hub funding	\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)
	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025	\$1.25 million
	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026	\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)
	FDF cross-hub projects	\$533,102 (October 2022)
	FDF Adoption Officer funding	\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)
Additional funding for all hubs	<b>Hubs have been provided with additional Australian Government grant funding up to June 2028:</b>	
	National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant	\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)
	NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 1)	\$455,000 (as of 30 June 2024)
	NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 2)	\$743,486 (to June 2028)
Additional funding (advised by hub)	<p>Agrifutures- Producer Technology Uptake Program</p> <p>Northern Australia Projects -   NTCA BlackBox Workshop, Kimberley and Pilbara Herd Management Group, Central Australia Artificial Insemination (AI) Technology Support Group</p>	\$94,500 (all received, projects complete)
	FDF Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes Grants Program- Scaling of proven landscape rehydration and sustainable management practices to restore natural functions in 2 central Australian rangeland catchments to trial, demonstrate and	\$926,343 (all received, project complete)

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes
	widely communicate to pastoral land holders in the NT and WA.
Cross-hub funding	The hub received a total of \$533,102 to lead 2 projects: Managing Rangelands for Drought Resilience, and Fast Tracking WA and NT to Align with Nutritional Feed Base Mapping Technology at a National Level, and participate in 1 Modern Soil Moisture Monitoring to Improve Irrigation (South-West WA lead).
Subcontracts	As of December 2023, the hub had 19 subcontracts with service providers for cash and in-kind contributions.  Of these, 9 involved the provision of cash in return for services.
Priorities and projects	On commencement the hub's 5 priorities were access to knowledge, improve management, enhance forage production and utilisation, improve use of water sources and increase human capacity. The 7 activities identified to address the priority areas were developing the knowledge bank, learning from past, Farm Business Resilience training, enhancing grazing practices, water use efficiency, First Nations drought projects and adoption officers.

Note: Summary information has been compiled using the following sources: Northern WA and NT Hub Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning reports and PR1 to PR7 2021-24, FDF Review request -Northern WA and NT Hub Staffing Survey response (Dec 2024), Commonwealth and Northern WA and NT Hub Grant Agreement and associated operational plans, notes from Review Panel meeting with hub staff 16 Sept 2024.

## SA Hub

Category	Notes
Vision	The SA Hub fosters an innovation and adoption collaboration spanning grower groups, universities, government agencies, landscape boards, Indigenous partners, agribusinesses, RD&E partners, industry bodies and organisations, and farm consultants and advisors.  The hub delivers co-designed demand driven collaborative projects and activities across pastoral, low, medium and high rainfall mixed farming regions to demonstrate and increase adoption of drought resilience practices, implement social resilience and wellbeing strategies and leverage investments for drought innovation and adoption initiatives.
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Driving extension of existing knowledge and practices to build drought resilience in primary production systems.</li> <li>Fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing among diverse organisations to build the capacity of SA farmers and regional communities and strengthen their drought resilience and preparedness.</li> <li>Primarily focusing on drought resilience enhancement for field crops, pastures, livestock and mixed farming systems towards a future hotter climate with more variable and likely less rainfall.</li> </ul>
Host organisation	The University of Adelaide (UoA)
Hub name and website	SA Drought Hub - South Australian Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub <a href="http://www.sadroughthub.com.au">www.sadroughthub.com.au</a>
Structure	The hub is an unincorporated joint venture led by UoA, in partnership with the Department of Primary Industries and Regions, SA acting through the South Australian Research and Development Institute (PIRSA-SARDI). The governance and advisory structures for the hub are detailed in the collaboration agreement between the UoA, PIRSA-SARDI and all hub members.
Delivery model	The hub is headquartered at the UoA Roseworthy campus and there are 5 regionally based nodes. Projects are primarily focused on extension and adoption but also incorporate applied research, development and commercial uptake. Projects and activities are co-designed with members and network partners to address priorities and themes arising from initial statewide consultation. Hub staff lead and/or assist with project and activity development and delivery. Hub projects and activities span economic, environmental and social dimensions of drought resilience across SA.

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes										
Members and partners	The UoA is signatory to the grant agreement with signatory members forming the consortium. As of January 2025, the hub has 30 ongoing consortium members and 40 new network partners including grower and livestock groups, universities, state government agencies, landscape boards, agribusinesses and industry group.										
Context	SA's gross value of agricultural production was \$10.7 billion in 2022–23 with field crops and livestock as the largest contributors. Drought and climate extremes have a major impact on farm productivity and profitability with impacts for farmers, environment and communities spanning multiple years.										
Hub locations and geographical coverage	<p>The hub covers all the agricultural production areas of SA. Nodes are located in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eyre Peninsula SA - Minnipa Node - PIRSA-SARDI employed coordinator</li> <li>• Far North and pastoral region</li> <li>• SA - Port Augusta Node - PIRSA-SARDI employed coordinator</li> <li>• Upper North SA - Orroroo Node - PIRSA-SARDI employed coordinator</li> <li>• Murray, Mallee and Riverland SA - Loxton Node - PIRSA-SARDI employed coordinator</li> <li>• Lower southeast SA - Struan Node - PIRSA-SARDI employed coordinator</li> <li>• The hub is currently undertaking a review of the delivery model to ensure it is best meeting the needs of members, farmers and regional communities.</li> </ul>										
Staffing	<p>13 hub staff members with a total of 10.8 FTE. Staff are employed by UoA, PIRSA/SARDI, Ag Excellence Alliance and SA Arid Lands Landscape Board.</p> <table> <tr> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director</li> <li>• Deputy Director</li> <li>• Knowledge Broker</li> <li>• Hub Manager</li> <li>• Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer</li> <li>• Regional Soils Coordinator<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Livestock Adoption Officer (x2<sup>3</sup>)</li> </ul> </td><td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovation Broker<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Farming Systems Adoption Officer<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Soils and Agriculture Rangelands Adoption Officer<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Loxton Node Coordinator &amp; Team Leader<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Minnipa &amp; Port Augusta Node Coordinator<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Orroroo Node Coordinator<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Struan Node Coordinator<sup>4</sup></li> </ul> </td></tr> </table> <p><sup>1</sup> Funded through NHT Building Landcare Community Capacity program, <sup>2</sup>Funded through separate agreement with AgriFutures, <sup>3</sup> Subcontract using core hub funds and external project funds, <sup>4</sup>Subcontract using core hub funds.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director</li> <li>• Deputy Director</li> <li>• Knowledge Broker</li> <li>• Hub Manager</li> <li>• Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer</li> <li>• Regional Soils Coordinator<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Livestock Adoption Officer (x2<sup>3</sup>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovation Broker<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Farming Systems Adoption Officer<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Soils and Agriculture Rangelands Adoption Officer<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Loxton Node Coordinator &amp; Team Leader<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Minnipa &amp; Port Augusta Node Coordinator<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Orroroo Node Coordinator<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Struan Node Coordinator<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>								
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director</li> <li>• Deputy Director</li> <li>• Knowledge Broker</li> <li>• Hub Manager</li> <li>• Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer</li> <li>• Regional Soils Coordinator<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Livestock Adoption Officer (x2<sup>3</sup>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovation Broker<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Farming Systems Adoption Officer<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Soils and Agriculture Rangelands Adoption Officer<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Loxton Node Coordinator &amp; Team Leader<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Minnipa &amp; Port Augusta Node Coordinator<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Orroroo Node Coordinator<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Struan Node Coordinator<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>										
Governance	<p>The main governance body for the hub is the Institutional Management Committee (IMC), which is made up of 1 representative each from the UoA and PIRSA-SARDI.</p> <p>Following an independent consultation on hub governance, the IMC will be changed to enable decision making to be reviewed by representatives from farming systems groups, Landscape Boards and industry.</p>										
Core hub funding	<p>Hubs have been provided with core hub funding up to June 2026:</p> <table> <tr> <td>Core hub funding</td><td>\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)</td></tr> <tr> <td>Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025</td><td>\$1.25 million</td></tr> <tr> <td>Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026</td><td>\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)</td></tr> <tr> <td>FDF cross-hub projects</td><td>\$789,199 (October 2022)</td></tr> <tr> <td>FDF Adoption Officer funding</td><td>\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)</td></tr> </table>	Core hub funding	\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025	\$1.25 million	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026	\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)	FDF cross-hub projects	\$789,199 (October 2022)	FDF Adoption Officer funding	\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)
Core hub funding	\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)										
Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025	\$1.25 million										
Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026	\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)										
FDF cross-hub projects	\$789,199 (October 2022)										
FDF Adoption Officer funding	\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)										
Additional funding for all hubs	<p>Hubs have been provided with additional Australian Government grant funding up to June 2028:</p> <table> <tr> <td>National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant</td><td>\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)</td></tr> <tr> <td>NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 1)</td><td>\$375,000 (as of 30 June 2024)</td></tr> </table>	National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant	\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)	NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 1)	\$375,000 (as of 30 June 2024)						
National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant	\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)										
NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 1)	\$375,000 (as of 30 June 2024)										

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes
	NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 2)      \$743,486 (to June 2028)
	NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 2)      \$743,486 (to June 2028)
Additional funding (advised by hub)	<p>The hub has partnered with SA Grain Industry Trust, SA Sheep Industry Fund and Landscape Boards through the Landscape Priority Fund for delivery of drought resilience projects in SA.</p> <p>Major partnerships include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AgriFutures - supporting employment of the Innovation Broker and projects in soils and agrivoltaics</li> <li>• Meat and Livestock Australia - funding of the Producing Profitable and Resilient Southern Beef Herds project supported by the SA Hub Livestock Adoption Officer and engaging SA, South-West WA &amp; Tas Hubs</li> <li>• FDF Extension and Adoption of Drought Resilience Farming Practices grant project - Adoption of key management practices for the success of dry and early sown crops led by Ag Excellence Alliance and engaging four Drought Hubs and grower groups across SA, WA, Victoria and NSW</li> <li>• FDF Extension and Adoption of Drought Resilience Farming Practices grant project - Farmers2Founders TEKfarm</li> <li>• Accelerating and scaling adoption of drought resilience technologies</li> <li>• Supporting roll out of project across SA with support from SA Hub Rangelands Adoption Officer and Innovation Broker</li> <li>• Support for the Regional Interns Program in partnership with SA Grain Industry Trust, grower groups and SARDI</li> </ul>
Cross-hub funding	Received \$789,199 to participate in 3 cross-hub projects: Drought Management for the Health and Longevity of Perennial Horticulture Plants (lead), and participation in Managing Rangelands for Drought Resilience (led by Northern WA and NT Hub) and Drought Resilience Practices in Mixed Farming Systems (led by VIC Hub).
Subcontracts	As of December 2024, the SA Hub had put in place 75 subcontracts with hub members and network partners for cash and in-kind contributions for the direct provision of on-ground projects for drought resilience practices.
Priorities and projects	<p>The 6 priority areas are community resilience and wellbeing, crop and pasture management, farm planning and decision-making, livestock and fodder management, soil and land management, and water security management.</p> <p>5 program areas cover Knowledge Sharing Adoption Pathways, Harnessing Innovation, Capacity Building, Increasing Awareness of the FDF, SA Hub &amp; Associated Drought Resilience Programs and the Hub Administration &amp; Governance.</p> <p>The hub has supported or facilitated delivery of over 400 activities, including field demonstrations sites, internships and regional learning events developed through the SA Grower Group Network, SA Landscape Boards, research partners, and industry groups with delivery on the ground driven primarily through the regionally based grower groups.</p> <p>The hub is currently engaged in multiple collaborations and partnerships with a wide array of organisations including hub member organisations, other hubs, RDCs, state/territory agencies, local government, First Nations communities, and other stakeholders. Hub members are connected to these partnerships to increase collaboration between organisations and build drought resilience networks across the state.</p>

Note: Summary information has been compiled using the following sources: SA Hub Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning reports and PR1 to PR7 2021-24, SA Hub website, FDF Review request-SA Hub Staffing Survey response (Dec 2024), FDF Review request-SA Hub Additional Questions response (Dec 2024), Commonwealth and SA Hub Grant Agreement and associated operational plans, personal communications with Hub Directors and staff as part of online Review Team and Panel consultations, Have Your Say stakeholder submissions, SA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub Review Consultation Report Aug 2024.

## Southern NSW Hub

Category	Notes
Vision	Connected and adaptable people and places, prepared to respond to future challenges and to capitalise on opportunities.
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating approaches to engagement, adoption and commercialisation that are modern, relevant and effective in enabling sustained change.</li> <li>• Connecting people and organisations across geography, cultures and farming enterprises to create a skilled, flexible network able to identify and solve the challenges and opportunities facing agriculture and agricultural focused landscapes and communities now and in the future.</li> <li>• Building agricultural and community engagement, extension, adoption and commercialisation capacity in southern NSW, so that the knowledge and tools required to adapt to current and future conditions are available where and when required.</li> <li>• Supporting people and organisations to adopt appropriate new technologies, resources, ideas and systems in an efficient and sustained way.</li> <li>• Attracting investment into priority projects, activities, and programs in southern NSW so that existing knowledge is adopted and the new knowledge that is needed is created and adopted.</li> <li>• Delivering a portfolio of RDE&amp;A projects focused on drought and climate resilience for southern NSW.</li> </ul>
Host organisation	Charles Sturt University (CSU)
Hub name and website	Southern NSW Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub <a href="https://www.csu.edu.au/research/southern-nsw-drought-resilience-hub">https://www.csu.edu.au/research/southern-nsw-drought-resilience-hub</a> .
Structure	The hub is an unincorporated joint venture hosted by CSU. CSU has a collaboration agreement with 6 lead members.
Delivery model	The hub focuses on coordination and works through partner organisations. The main office is based in Wagga Wagga at CSU. The hub has a knowledge broker network, some of whom are located in partner organisations.
Members and partners	9 hub members are identified in the hub's grant agreement: universities, agricultural research and extension organisations, state government, and non-profit organisations. This has reduced to 7 with the departure of the University of Wollongong and CSU's First Nations Governance Circle ceasing to exist.
Context	Key agricultural industries include aquaculture, dairy, dryland and irrigated cropping, meat and livestock production, perennial horticulture (including viticulture and extensive post farm gate value added enterprises). The region exhibits extreme climatic variations. There are also numerous agrifood manufacturing and product value adding organisations based in the southern NSW region.
Hub locations and geographical coverage	<p>The boundary of the hub's region consists of a line from Broken Hill to Cobar, which joins the Macquarie catchment northern boundary near Quambone. The boundary then follows the western and southern edges of the Hunter catchment, joins the northern edges of the Sydney Catchment near Kandos and meets the coast near the mouth of the Hawkesbury River. The southern and western boundaries are the Victorian and South Australian state borders.</p> <p>The hub's network of adoption officers is located within the NSW government's Local Land Services offices in South East, Murray, Riverina, Central West, Hunter regions. The hub is currently undertaking a review of the delivery model to ensure it is best meeting the needs of hub members, farmers and regional communities in increasing drought resilience and preparedness.</p>
Staffing	24 hub staff members with a total of 17.94 FTE. Positions are funded through core hub funding unless otherwise noted as following.

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes												
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hub Director<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Chief Knowledge Broker<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Program Manager (x2<sup>1</sup>)</li> <li>• Program Manager</li> <li>• First Nations Engagement Officer</li> <li>• Operations and Partnership Manager<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Communications and Engagement Manager<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Communications Co-ordinator</li> <li>• Engagement &amp; Contracts Officer</li> <li>• Finance &amp; Compliance Manager<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Administrative Assistant</li> <li>• Finance Administrative Officer</li> <li>• Hub HDR Engage Program Facilitator (x3)</li> <li>• Adoption Officer (x5<sup>2</sup>)</li> <li>• Knowledge Broker (x3<sup>3</sup>)</li> <li>• Senior Projects and Programs Officer<sup>2</sup></li> </ul> <p><sup>1</sup> Funds are recovered from other funding sources for salary costs where staff time is dedicated to these projects. In 2024, approximately 0.9 of an average FTE was recovered for the work of these staff members. <sup>2</sup> Southern NSW Hub Drought Adoption Officers employed through NSW Local Land Services – roles set to finish in December 2025. <sup>3</sup> Funded through service agreements with Western Landcare NSW and Regional Circularity Co-operative to finish May 2025.</p>												
Governance	An Innovation Hub Board oversees the hub and comprises a nominee of each partner organisation, the Hub Director and an independent chair. Responsibilities of the board include government reporting as required by the grant agreement, oversight and endorsement of the hub's work plan and budget, and detailed financial oversight of the hub's operations.												
Core hub funding	<p><b>Hubs have been provided with core hub funding up to June 2026:</b></p> <table> <tr> <td>Core hub funding</td><td>\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)</td></tr> <tr> <td>Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025</td><td>\$1.25 million</td></tr> <tr> <td>Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026</td><td>\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)</td></tr> <tr> <td>FDF cross-hub projects</td><td>\$433,333 (October 2022)</td></tr> <tr> <td>FDF Adoption Officer funding</td><td>\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)</td></tr> </table>	Core hub funding	\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025	\$1.25 million	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026	\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)	FDF cross-hub projects	\$433,333 (October 2022)	FDF Adoption Officer funding	\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)		
Core hub funding	\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)												
Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025	\$1.25 million												
Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026	\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)												
FDF cross-hub projects	\$433,333 (October 2022)												
FDF Adoption Officer funding	\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)												
Additional funding for all hubs	<p><b>Hubs have been provided with additional Australian Government grant funding up to June 2028:</b></p> <table> <tr> <td>National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant</td><td>\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)</td></tr> <tr> <td>NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 1)</td><td>\$375,000 (as of 30 June 2024)</td></tr> <tr> <td>NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 2)</td><td>\$743,486 (to June 2028)</td></tr> </table>	National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant	\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)	NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 1)	\$375,000 (as of 30 June 2024)	NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 2)	\$743,486 (to June 2028)						
National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant	\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)												
NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 1)	\$375,000 (as of 30 June 2024)												
NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 2)	\$743,486 (to June 2028)												
Additional funding (advised by hub)	<table> <tr> <td>FDF Long-term Trials of Drought Resilient Farming Practices</td><td>\$6,229 926 with \$5,323,788 (In-kind) (June 2028)</td></tr> <tr> <td>Drought Resilient Mixed Farming System Trials</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Grains Research &amp; Development Corporation -Risk Wi\$e – Action Research Group Lead</td><td>\$3,822,135 with \$1,824,985 (In-kind) June 2028</td></tr> <tr> <td>FDF Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes grant program Saving Our Soils</td><td>\$1,000,000 with \$240,000 (In-kind) June 2024</td></tr> <tr> <td>FDF Extension &amp; Adoption of Drought Resilient Practices Grant On-farm Water Management</td><td>\$1,509,599 with \$432,940 (In-kind) June 2025</td></tr> <tr> <td>FDF Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes grant program Resilient pasture systems</td><td>\$983,950 with \$1,010,500 (In-kind) June 2024</td></tr> </table>	FDF Long-term Trials of Drought Resilient Farming Practices	\$6,229 926 with \$5,323,788 (In-kind) (June 2028)	Drought Resilient Mixed Farming System Trials		Grains Research & Development Corporation -Risk Wi\$e – Action Research Group Lead	\$3,822,135 with \$1,824,985 (In-kind) June 2028	FDF Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes grant program Saving Our Soils	\$1,000,000 with \$240,000 (In-kind) June 2024	FDF Extension & Adoption of Drought Resilient Practices Grant On-farm Water Management	\$1,509,599 with \$432,940 (In-kind) June 2025	FDF Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes grant program Resilient pasture systems	\$983,950 with \$1,010,500 (In-kind) June 2024
FDF Long-term Trials of Drought Resilient Farming Practices	\$6,229 926 with \$5,323,788 (In-kind) (June 2028)												
Drought Resilient Mixed Farming System Trials													
Grains Research & Development Corporation -Risk Wi\$e – Action Research Group Lead	\$3,822,135 with \$1,824,985 (In-kind) June 2028												
FDF Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes grant program Saving Our Soils	\$1,000,000 with \$240,000 (In-kind) June 2024												
FDF Extension & Adoption of Drought Resilient Practices Grant On-farm Water Management	\$1,509,599 with \$432,940 (In-kind) June 2025												
FDF Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes grant program Resilient pasture systems	\$983,950 with \$1,010,500 (In-kind) June 2024												

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes
	Climate Coaching for on-farm decision making - \$190,820 March 2023 Commonwealth RR&D4 program via Meat & Livestock Australia
Cross-hub funding	Received \$433,333 to participate in 2 cross-hub projects: the Drought Management for the Health and Longevity of Perennial Horticulture Plants (led by SA Hub) and Managing Rangelands for Drought Resilience (lead by Northern WA and NT Hub).
Subcontracts	As host of the hub, CSU, has a collaboration agreement with 6 lead members. This agreement documents the cash and in-kind contributions that each member has committed to hub activities. The hub has also entered into project agreements (or subcontracts) with 4 members where cash has been provided in return for the delivery of hub activities. One of these members represents 9 farming systems groups. The hub has also entered into a number of service agreements with partner organisations to support the delivery of hub activities.
Priorities and projects	<p>Activities supported by core hub funding are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compilation of existing or generating new insights that ultimately help farms, communities and landscapes be more drought and climate resilient.</li> <li>• Developing and supporting the development of extension and adoption capacity within southern NSW to enable effective extension resulting in adoption of drought and climate resilience strategies by farmers, land managers and communities.</li> <li>• Developing and implementing values-based engagement and co-design approaches that are more effective in extension and result in quicker more sustained adoption of resilience strategies by farmers, land managers and communities, and embedding these co-design skills in partner organisations through training initiatives.</li> <li>• Co-designing priorities and projects that build resilience for farms, communities and landscapes with stakeholders and leveraging hub resources and capability to secure investment in these projects for delivery by partners and other stakeholders in NSW. The 6 key impact areas for the building of drought and climate resilience in southern NSW are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Social and Cultural Resilience</li> <li>– Rural Communities; Social and Cultural Resilience</li> <li>– First Nations</li> <li>– Enhancing and Preserving the Natural Environment</li> <li>– Farming Systems and Decisions, Soil Health, Water and Water Use.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>The hub has completed 3 Ag innovation hub-funded projects, being Early Insights for More Resilient Communities, the award-winning Managing Biosecurity Risks, and the Ag Tech Return on Investment Calculator. Again, these projects were identified through stakeholder engagement and co-designed with project partners. The focus of this funding was transformative innovation resulting in these projects having more research than typical hub projects and a broader, longer-term scope.</p>

Note: Summary information has been compiled using the following sources: Southern NSW Hub Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning reports and PR1 to PR7 2021-24, Southern NSW Hub website, FDF Review request-Southern NSW Hub Staffing Survey response (Dec 2024), FDF Review request-Southern NSW Additional Questions response (Dec 2024), Commonwealth and SNSW Hub Grant Agreement and associated operational plans, personal communications with Hub Directors and staff as part of online Review Team and Panel consultations.

## Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub

Category	Notes
Vision	Delivering improved drought resilience and agricultural innovation benefits to the southern Qld northern NSW region. The hub drives innovation within its region through connecting communities and businesses with opportunities and networks that support and facilitate future thinking, planning and development.



## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve management and investment decisions through better drought preparedness, adaptation and risk management and transfer options.</li> <li>• The development of knowledge about and uptake of relevant agricultural innovations, helping to deliver economic resilience for an innovative and profitable agricultural sector.</li> <li>• Socio-economic benefits including business stability through the flow-on effects of primary productivity. Helping to deliver economic resilience for an innovative and profitable agricultural sector, and social resilience for resourceful and adaptable communities</li> <li>• Social and environmental benefits including increased industry capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from drought and future climate variability and improved land condition.</li> <li>• Increased social and economic diversity via the support of agricultural innovation and adaptation - helping to deliver environmental resilience for sustainable and improved functioning of farming landscapes, and social resilience for resourceful and adaptable communities.</li> </ul>
Host organisation	University of Southern Queensland (USQ)
Hub name and website	Southern Qld Northern NSW Innovation Hub <a href="http://www.unisq.edu.au/research/sqnsw-hub">www.unisq.edu.au/research/sqnsw-hub</a>
Structure	The hub is located within USQ's Institute for Resilient Regions which conducts multidisciplinary collaborative research to help regional communities embrace and adapt to change while maintaining their unique identities. The hub's nodes are located with and managed by the hub's members.
Delivery model	The hub has adopted a hub and spoke model. The hub's main office is based in Toowoomba, and the 7 nodes are located across the region within the offices of the hub's members.
Members and partners	19 hub members and 15 partners were identified in the hub's initial grant agreement, including universities, state governments, research institutions, industry representative organisations, NRMs and education providers. As of June 2024, the hub's network included 23 hub members and 15 partners.
Context	Key agricultural industries within the hub's geographic coverage are livestock, broadacre cropping, cotton, horticulture, viticulture, tree crops, sugarcane, and agribusiness and agriculture advisory ecosystems.
Hub locations and geographical coverage	<p>The Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub is 1 of 2 cross-border hubs. It covers approximately 1.7 million square kilometres from Longreach, Queensland to Dubbo, NSW and from the east coast to the South Australian and Northern Territory borders in the west. The 7 nodes are in the following locations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Armidale, University of New England (UNE)</li> <li>• Lismore, Southern Cross University (SCU)</li> <li>• Stanthorpe, Queensland College of Wine Tourism (QCWT)</li> <li>• Narrabri, Local Land Services, NSW government</li> <li>• Longreach, Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD)</li> <li>• Roma, Southern Queensland Landscapes (SQL)</li> <li>• South East Queensland, Healthy Land and Water (established in January to June 2024 period).</li> </ul>
Staffing	30 staff members with a total of 27 FTE. Positions are funded through core hub funding unless otherwise noted as following:

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes										
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Hub Manager</li> <li>• Communication Manager<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Implementation Support Coordinator</li> <li>• Operations Officers (x2)</li> <li>• Node Manager (Roma)<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Node Manager (Stanthorpe)</li> <li>• Node Manager (South East Queensland)<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Node Manager (Longreach)</li> <li>• Node Manager (Lismore)<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Node Manager (Armidale)<sup>5</sup></li> <li>• Node Manager (Narrabri)<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Knowledge Broker</li> <li>• Innovation Broker<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Regional Soils Coordinator<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Senior Projects and Programs Officers<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Adoption officers (x12<sup>5</sup>)</li> </ul> <p><sup>1</sup> In-kind contribution from USQ, <sup>2</sup> Core hub funds to Southern Queensland Landscapes, Healthy Land and Water, Southern Cross University, <sup>5</sup> University of New England <sup>6</sup> Local Land Services, <sup>3</sup> Funded through separate agreement with AgriFutures <sup>4</sup> Funded through NHT Building Landcare Community Capacity program,<sup>5</sup> Hub funding of 9 of 11 positions through contract to x2 Healthy Land and Water, x2 Southern Cross University, x7 Local Land Services</p>										
Governance	<p>A steering committee oversees assessment and delivery of the hub, the policy framework, risk management, scope, implementation methodology, timeframes, cyber security and budget. The committee approves the hub's activity workplan and budget. Membership includes research institutions, industry groups, NRM providers, state and local government, and business consultants and insurers. This committee has been paused since 2024.</p> <p>Next Generation Council – An advisory body made up of 18–40 year-olds from primary producer, tech founder, higher education, Indigenous organisation and regional youth organisation industries.</p>										
Core hub funding	<p>Hubs have been provided with core hub funding up to June 2026:</p> <table> <tr> <td>Core hub funding</td><td>\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)<sup>1</sup></td></tr> <tr> <td>Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025</td><td>\$1.25 million</td></tr> <tr> <td>Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026</td><td>\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)</td></tr> <tr> <td>FDF cross-hub projects</td><td>\$183,333 (October 2022)</td></tr> <tr> <td>FDF Adoption Officer funding</td><td>\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)</td></tr> </table> <p><sup>1</sup> An additional payment of \$2 million was provided to the University of New England, Armidale Node.</p>	Core hub funding	\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024) <sup>1</sup>	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025	\$1.25 million	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026	\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)	FDF cross-hub projects	\$183,333 (October 2022)	FDF Adoption Officer funding	\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)
Core hub funding	\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024) <sup>1</sup>										
Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025	\$1.25 million										
Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026	\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)										
FDF cross-hub projects	\$183,333 (October 2022)										
FDF Adoption Officer funding	\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)										
Additional funding for all hubs	<p><b>Hubs have been provided with additional Australian Government grant funding up to June 2028:</b></p> <table> <tr> <td>National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant</td><td>\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)</td></tr> <tr> <td>NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 1)</td><td>\$375,000 (as of 30 June 2024)</td></tr> <tr> <td>NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 2)</td><td>\$743,486 (to June 2028)</td></tr> </table>	National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant	\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)	NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 1)	\$375,000 (as of 30 June 2024)	NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 2)	\$743,486 (to June 2028)				
National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant	\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)										
NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 1)	\$375,000 (as of 30 June 2024)										
NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 2)	\$743,486 (to June 2028)										
Additional funding (advised by hub)	No additional project funding was identified.										
Cross-hub funding	Received \$183,333 to participate in 1 cross-hub project, Managing Rangelands for Drought Resilience (Northern WA and NT Hub Lead).										

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes
Subcontracts	As of December 2023, the hub had 34 subcontracts with service providers for cash and in-kind contributions. Of these, 6 involved the provision of cash in return for service
Priorities and projects	<p>The hub's 4 priorities are data and decision-making, wellbeing and employability, environmental commodities, and best practice agriculture and preparing for drought.</p> <p>The hub has 8 active drought resilience projects, including co-innovation networks, place-based drought management toolkit and extension and adoption, solving place-based challenges through local participatory research and trialling, First Nations engagement, PhD student top up scholarships, online wellbeing and employability toolkit, and solving place-based challenges through local participatory research and trialling.</p>

Note: Summary information has been compiled using the following sources: Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning reports and PR1 to PR7 2021-24, Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub website, FDF Review request-Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub Staffing Survey response (Dec 2024), FDF Review request-Southern Qld Northern NSW Hub Additional Questions response (Dec 2024), Commonwealth and SQNNSW Hub Grant Agreement and associated operational plans, personal communications with Hub Directors and staff as part of online Review Team and Panel consultations, Have Your Say stakeholder submissions.

## South-West WA Hub

Category	Notes
Vision	Thriving producers and communities adapting to our variable environment.
Objective	Be a connected and trusted partner building pathways to accelerate innovation and adoption.
Host organisation	Grower Group Alliance (GGA), a producer-led network of grower groups supporting agricultural innovation, adoption and collaboration.
Hub name and website	South-West WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub <a href="http://www.gga.org.au/activity/drought-hub">www.gga.org.au/activity/drought-hub</a>
Structure	Partnership agreement formalised with agreed consortium participants (unincorporated joint venture).
Delivery model	<p>The hub operates through a geographical area in WA that is 'essentially everything south of the Pilbara'. This is divided into 4 distinct agro-ecological zones (Wheatbelt, Southern Rangelands, Southwest and Mid-West &amp; Gascoyne Coastal) with their own sectors and priorities.</p> <p>The hub has 8 nodes, each of which is operated by a mix of Grower Groups, Food Councils and NRMs.</p>
Members and partners	47 formal partners were identified in the hub's initial grant agreement, including NRM WA, research institutions, industry representative organisation. As of June 2024, the hub reported its network includes 54 hub partners.
Context	Different farming systems occur throughout the hub's location, from pastoralism in the north and east, through to the grain and livestock industries of the Wheatbelt, interspersed with horticulture, viticulture and dairy, concentrated in the South-West area but extending well into the Great Southern region and north of Perth. The widely dispersed nature of the agricultural industries adds significant cost to the operations of the hub.

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes																
Hub locations and geographical coverage	<p>Hub operations are based out of the GGA offices in Perth. Staff are also located in Bunbury, Merredin and Narrogin. These offices are co-located with the WA Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (WA DPIRD). Nodes are located at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Merredin, Merredin and Districts Farm Improvement Group</li> <li>• Esperance, South East Premium Wheat Growers Association</li> <li>• Narrogin/Wickepin, Facey Group</li> <li>• Albany, Stirlings to Coast Farmers</li> <li>• Manjimup, Southern Forests Food Council</li> <li>• Bunbury, South West Catchments Council – now South West NRM</li> <li>• Geraldton, Northern Agricultural Catchments Council (NRM group)</li> <li>• Carnarvon, Rangelands NRM Group</li> </ul> <p>The boundary between the South-West WA and Northern WA and NT Hubs is not fixed and overlaps in Carnarvon where both hubs have a node. The hub teams work collaboratively with stakeholders in the overlap area.</p>																
Staffing	<p>15 staff members work across the hub with a total of 10.5 FTE. All hub staff are employed by GGA using FDF core hub funds unless otherwise noted as following. Hub roles include:</p> <table> <tr> <td>• Director</td><td>• MEL Manager</td></tr> <tr> <td>• Knowledge Broker</td><td>• Administration</td></tr> <tr> <td>• Project Manager - Hub</td><td>• Project Manager - Special Projects</td></tr> <tr> <td>• Extension Specialist/Knowledge Broker</td><td>• Strategic Stakeholder Manager</td></tr> <tr> <td>• Communications and Stakeholder Manager</td><td>• GGA CFO<sup>1</sup></td></tr> <tr> <td>• Node Coordinator</td><td>• GGA CEO<sup>1</sup></td></tr> <tr> <td>• Extension/Adoption Officer</td><td>• Innovation Broker<sup>2</sup></td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td>• Regional Soils Coordinator<sup>3</sup></td></tr> </table> <p><sup>1</sup> In-kind funded by host organisation, <sup>2</sup> Funded through separate agreement with AgriFutures, <sup>3</sup> Funded through NHT Building Landcare Community Capacity program</p>	• Director	• MEL Manager	• Knowledge Broker	• Administration	• Project Manager - Hub	• Project Manager - Special Projects	• Extension Specialist/Knowledge Broker	• Strategic Stakeholder Manager	• Communications and Stakeholder Manager	• GGA CFO <sup>1</sup>	• Node Coordinator	• GGA CEO <sup>1</sup>	• Extension/Adoption Officer	• Innovation Broker <sup>2</sup>		• Regional Soils Coordinator <sup>3</sup>
• Director	• MEL Manager																
• Knowledge Broker	• Administration																
• Project Manager - Hub	• Project Manager - Special Projects																
• Extension Specialist/Knowledge Broker	• Strategic Stakeholder Manager																
• Communications and Stakeholder Manager	• GGA CFO <sup>1</sup>																
• Node Coordinator	• GGA CEO <sup>1</sup>																
• Extension/Adoption Officer	• Innovation Broker <sup>2</sup>																
	• Regional Soils Coordinator <sup>3</sup>																
Governance	<p>The GGA Steering Committee oversees the hub project governance. The steering committee is independent of hub management and comprises 2 GGA representatives (independent Directors from the GGA Board) and 2 industry representatives chosen for their experience and broad understanding of the WA agricultural context (one of whom is currently a Director at WA DPIRD). The steering committee reports to the GGA Board, which is accountable for program delivery.</p> <p>The hub has also appointed 4 Regional Advisory Committees (RACs), with skills-based representatives of agricultural industries for each of 4 agro-ecological zones covered by the hub. The 4 RACs provide guidance to the hub on priority issues impacting the drought and climate resilience of farming systems, their industries and communities.</p>																
Core hub funding	<p>Hubs have been provided with core hub funding up to June 2026:</p> <table> <tr> <td>Core hub funding</td><td>\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)</td></tr> <tr> <td>Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025</td><td>\$1.25 million</td></tr> <tr> <td>Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026</td><td>\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)</td></tr> <tr> <td>FDF cross-hub projects</td><td>\$713,102 (October 2022)</td></tr> <tr> <td>FDF Adoption Officer funding</td><td>\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)</td></tr> </table>	Core hub funding	\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025	\$1.25 million	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026	\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)	FDF cross-hub projects	\$713,102 (October 2022)	FDF Adoption Officer funding	\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)						
Core hub funding	\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)																
Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025	\$1.25 million																
Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026	\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)																
FDF cross-hub projects	\$713,102 (October 2022)																
FDF Adoption Officer funding	\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)																
Additional funding for all hubs	<p><b>Hubs have been provided with additional Australian Government grant funding up to June 2028:</b></p> <table> <tr> <td>National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant</td><td>\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)</td></tr> </table>	National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant	\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)														
National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant	\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)																

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes
	<p>NHT Regional Soil Coordinators \$447,115 (as of 30 June 2024) (Round 1)</p> <p>NHT Regional Soil Coordinators \$743,486 (to June 2028) (Round 2)</p>
Additional funding (advised by the hub)	<p>Grants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FDF Drought Resilience Innovation Grants Program – Innovation Grant-WaterSmart Dams - Making Dams Work Again \$2.9 M December 2024</li> </ul> <p>Sponsorships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cooperative Bulk Handling Pty Ltd \$30,000 General sponsorship of the South-West WA Hub Showcase Event 2024</li> <li>GRDC \$15,000 Assistance to WA growers attending a study tour in South Australia investigating frost solutions in grain production</li> </ul>
Cross-hub funding	Received \$713,102 in October 2022 to participate in 3 cross-hub projects: Modern Soil Moisture Monitoring to Improve Irrigation (lead), Fast tracking WA and NT to Align with Nutritional Feed Base Mapping Technology at a National Level (lead) and participation in Managing Rangelands for Drought Resilience (Northern WA and NT Hub lead).
Subcontracts	As of December 2023, GGA had 60 subcontracts with service providers for cash and in-kind contributions. Of these, 12 involved the provision of cash in return for services.
Priorities and projects	<p>The hub has 6 themes/priorities, which were identified following a co-design process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agricultural Practices – Agronomy</li> <li>Agricultural Practices – Livestock</li> <li>Digital Agriculture</li> <li>Business Management</li> <li>Water Management</li> <li>Carbon Footprint</li> </ul> <p>Each agro-ecological zone adopts its own set of priorities from these themes, based on advice from the RACs.</p> <p>Since its inception, the hub has facilitated 22 projects, including collaborations with other hubs and the WA Government. It has also supported a further 15 projects led by universities and farming industry groups.</p> <p>Of its projects, the hub has identified 6 projects that can achieve transformational change to current systems that have an altered risk landscape. The hub awarded grants worth \$1 million to each of these projects, with collaborating organisations contributing further funding.</p> <p>The hub collaborates with WA DPIRD and Regional Development Commissions on the development of WA's RDRP program.</p>

Note: Summary information has been compiled using the following sources: South-West WA Hub Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning reports and PR1 to PR7 2021-24, South-West WA Hub website, FDF Review request-South-West WA Hub Staffing Survey response (Dec 2024), FDF Review request-South-West WA Hub Additional Questions response (Dec 2024), Commonwealth and South-West WA Hub Grant Agreement and associated operational plans, personal communications with Hub Directors and staff as part of online Review Team and Panel consultations, Have Your Say stakeholder submissions.

## Tas Hub

Category	Notes
Vision	Tasmanian farm businesses and their communities are innovative, resilient, and prepared for the financial, social, and environmental opportunities and impacts of climate change and variability.
Objective	Enabling innovation through increased access to knowledge and adoption of practice changes that support the vision.

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes
Host organisation	University of Tasmania (UTAS)
Hub name and website	TAS Farm Innovation Hub <a href="https://www.tasfarmhub.com.au/">https://www.tasfarmhub.com.au/</a>
Structure	The hub sits under the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA), a specialist institute of agricultural research and industry development at UTAS. The TIA is a joint venture between UTAS and the Tasmanian Government.
Delivery model	Due to Tasmania's small geographical area, the Tas Hub provides integrated support across the state's agricultural sector without formal nodes.
Members and partners	<p>19 members signed up to the hub as part of the initial grant agreement, including NRMs, research institutions, industry representative organisation, and water management organisations.</p> <p>As of June 2024, the Tas Hub reported its network includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 hub partners (organisations who made a cash or in-kind commitment to the hub at its establishment),</li> <li>• 6 on-ground delivery partners (not formal partners but provided hub funds to lead the delivery of on-ground projects or activities), and</li> <li>• 11 contributors (organisations who support and/or contribute to on-ground projects or other activities).</li> </ul>
Context	<p>Tasmania has a highly variable climate with diverse agricultural systems. Some areas of Tasmania (such as the Southern Midlands, East Coast and Flinders Island) are accustomed to drought and dry conditions whilst other areas experience reliable rainfall. As a result, Tasmania's experience of drought and dry conditions, when compared to other agricultural regions of Australia, often means short period of dry conditions can have long-term impacts.</p> <p>Key industries in Tasmania include livestock (beef and sheep), dairy, vegetables, berries, apples, cherries and wine grapes.</p>
Hub locations and geographical coverage	Hub headquarters is in Launceston, with staff also based in Hobart and Burnie (co-located at UTAS campuses). Rural Business Tasmania also provides a shopfront in Launceston's CBD. Field sites and farms from hub partners and UTAS are used as additional project sites across the state.
Staffing	<p>19 staff members with a total of 15.6 FTE. All hub staff are employed through UTAS except for the Regional Soils Coordinator who is employed through NRM South. Positions are funded through the hub head agreement unless otherwise noted as following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director</li> <li>• Deputy Director<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Lead Knowledge Broker</li> <li>• Business &amp; Operations Manager</li> <li>• Extension Program Manager</li> <li>• Comms &amp; Strategic Partnerships Manager</li> <li>• Senior Extension Officer</li> <li>• Projects Manager</li> <li>• Knowledge Broker</li> <li>• Extension Officer</li> <li>• Projects Coordinator</li> <li>• Events Coordinator</li> <li>• Executive Assistant</li> <li>• Independent Chair, Industry Advisory Board</li> <li>• Innovation Broker<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Regional Soils Coordinator<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Cultural Engagement Coordinator</li> <li>• TIA Industry Engagement Lead</li> <li>• TIA Climate Resilience Officer</li> </ul>

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes										
	<sup>1</sup> In-kind contribution from UTAS, <sup>2</sup> Funded through AgriFutures, <sup>3</sup> Funded through NHT Building Landcare Community Capacity program										
Governance	<p>An Industry Advisory Board (IAB) provides strategic guidance to the hub on priorities and activities, and ensures it delivers on strategic priorities and complies with the grant agreement.</p> <p>There are up to 11 members on the IAB comprised of an independent chair, up to 6 hub partners, representatives from the Tasmanian Government, 2 senior UTAS members, and 2 industry representatives. Decisions on the spending of funds or hub activities are made by the hub's executive team following advice from the IAB.</p>										
Core hub funding	<p><b>Hubs have been provided with core hub funding up to June 2026:</b></p> <table> <tr> <td>Core hub funding</td><td>\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)</td></tr> <tr> <td>Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025</td><td>\$1.25 million</td></tr> <tr> <td>Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026</td><td>\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)</td></tr> <tr> <td>FDF cross-hub projects</td><td>\$405,969 (October 2022)</td></tr> <tr> <td>FDF Adoption Officer funding</td><td>\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)</td></tr> </table>	Core hub funding	\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025	\$1.25 million	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026	\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)	FDF cross-hub projects	\$405,969 (October 2022)	FDF Adoption Officer funding	\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)
Core hub funding	\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)										
Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025	\$1.25 million										
Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026	\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)										
FDF cross-hub projects	\$405,969 (October 2022)										
FDF Adoption Officer funding	\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)										
Additional funding for all hubs	<p><b>Hubs have been provided with additional Commonwealth grant funding up to June 2028:</b></p> <table> <tr> <td>National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant</td><td>\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)</td></tr> <tr> <td>NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 1)</td><td>\$455,000 (as of 30 June 2024)</td></tr> <tr> <td>NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 2)</td><td>\$743,486 (to June 2028)</td></tr> </table>	National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant	\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)	NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 1)	\$455,000 (as of 30 June 2024)	NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 2)	\$743,486 (to June 2028)				
National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant	\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)										
NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 1)	\$455,000 (as of 30 June 2024)										
NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 2)	\$743,486 (to June 2028)										
Additional funding (advised by the hub)	<table> <tr> <td>AgriFutures Digital Literacy Project</td><td>\$148,800 (March 2023 to June 2024)</td></tr> <tr> <td>AgriFutures Xhub Agrivoltaics' Project</td><td>\$45,000 (total grant \$500,000 – Dec 2024 to June 2026)</td></tr> <tr> <td>AgriFutures Innovation Brokerage Services</td><td>\$420,000 (June 2022 to June 2025)</td></tr> </table>	AgriFutures Digital Literacy Project	\$148,800 (March 2023 to June 2024)	AgriFutures Xhub Agrivoltaics' Project	\$45,000 (total grant \$500,000 – Dec 2024 to June 2026)	AgriFutures Innovation Brokerage Services	\$420,000 (June 2022 to June 2025)				
AgriFutures Digital Literacy Project	\$148,800 (March 2023 to June 2024)										
AgriFutures Xhub Agrivoltaics' Project	\$45,000 (total grant \$500,000 – Dec 2024 to June 2026)										
AgriFutures Innovation Brokerage Services	\$420,000 (June 2022 to June 2025)										
Cross-hub funding	Received \$405,969 to participate in 2 cross-hub projects: Drought Management for the Health and Longevity of Perennial Horticulture Plants (led by SA Hub) and Drought Resilience Practices in Mixed Farming Systems projects (led by Vic Hub).										
Subcontracts	As of December 2023, the hub had 27 subcontracts with service providers for cash and in-kind contributions. Of these, 3 involved the provision of cash in return for services.										
Priorities and projects	<p>The hub's 5 priorities for their drought resilience activities are farm planning and preparedness, water, landscapes, climate, and community.</p> <p>The hub has 10 active drought resilience projects delivered by partners, including water use efficiency and redesigning grazing for drought resilience. It also delivers activities targeted to making information more accessible, fostering collaboration and networks, and building capacity and skills across the innovation system.</p> <p>The hub participates in the AgriFutures Innovation Brokerage Services Pilot, supports TIA in their FDF Long Term Trial proposals, and collaborates with organisations delivering other FDF programs such as FBR and RDRP (state government), the Community Impact Program, and My Climate View (CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology).</p>										

Note: Summary information has been compiled using the following sources: Tas Hub Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning reports and PR1 to PR7 2021-24, Tas Hub website, FDF Review request-Tas Hub Staffing Survey response (Dec 2024), FDF

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Review request-Tas Hub Additional Questions response (Dec 2024), Commonwealth and Tas Hub Grant Agreement and associated operational plans, personal communications with Hub Directors and staff as part of online Review Team and Panel consultations, Have Your Say stakeholder submissions.

## Tropical North Qld Hub

Category	Notes
Vision	Northern Queensland becomes drought resilient through an innovative, profitable and sustainable agricultural sector and resourceful and adaptable communities.
Objective	<p>The hub leads a regional, collaborative approach with northern Queensland stakeholders to support the agricultural sector and communities to become more drought and climate resilient.</p> <p>The hub will capture and broker knowledge from activities and shared experiences to develop economic, social and environmental resilience against drought's devastating impacts. This will be achieved through co-design processes where practical strategies, being complemented with innovative enabling technologies, will make adoption of new sustainability measures attractive and accessible.</p> <p>The hub will closely engage with local farmers, hub members, network partners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other stakeholders to boost capacity for innovative responses to drought impacts.</p> <p>The hub will be focused on adding value, rather than replicating existing similar activities within the region. All activities undertaken will be transparent and inclusive of all interested stakeholders, and outputs will be made accessible to as broad an audience as possible. The focus of the hub activities is to achieve change that is scalable and transformative in its impact to addressing drought.</p>
Host organisation	James Cook University (JCU)
Hub name and website	<p>TNQ Drought Hub - Tropical North Queensland Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub</p> <p><a href="http://www.tnqdroughthub.com.au">www.tnqdroughthub.com.au</a></p>
Structure	The hub is an unincorporated joint venture hosted by JCU. Hub nodes have been established in collaboration with consortium members in the Gulf Country, Cape York, Wet Tropics, Fitzroy, Dry Tropics and Whitsunday regions. The steering committee is responsible for strategic prioritisation and accountability.
Delivery model	The hub is designed as a hub and spoke model, with activities delivered at both at hub program and node level. This model captures and allows for differing requirements driven by spatial variation in climate conditions and agricultural sectors by utilising existing networks - NRM groups - as the location of the nodes.
Members and partners	11 formal members were identified in the hub's initial grant agreement, including NRMs, research institutions and the Indigenous Council Alliance. As of June 2024, the hub's network includes 13 hub members and 15 network partners.
Context	<p>The historically dominant agricultural sectors within the hub region are grazing, horticulture and sugar.</p> <p>There is currently significant diversification and addition of other agriculture industries and sectors across the region emerging such as grain, cotton, dairy, vegetables, citrus fruit, tropical fruit and terrestrial aquaculture. The impacts of drought on these sectors vary significantly across the region.</p>



## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes										
Hub locations and geographical coverage	<p>The hub covers all northern Queensland, from the Gulf of Carpentaria to the west border with the Northern Territory through to the east coast and north to Cape York. Its footprint covers approximately 850,000 square kilometres - 45% of the Queensland land mass.</p> <p>The hub operates out of Cairns and Townsville, with node locations across the region operated by members of the hub consortium:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burdekin, NQ Dry Tropics</li> <li>• Gulf of Carpentaria, Southern Gulf NRM</li> <li>• Gulf Savannah, Gulf Savannah NRM</li> <li>• Fitzroy, Fitzroy Basin Association</li> <li>• Mackay and Whitsundays, Reef Catchments</li> <li>• Cape York, Cape York NRM</li> <li>• Wet Tropics, JCU</li> </ul>										
Staffing	<p>22 hub staff members with a total of 16.5 FTE. All positions are funded using core hub funds unless otherwise indicated as following. Hub positions include:</p> <table> <tr> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director</li> <li>• Knowledge Broker</li> <li>• Program Manager</li> <li>• Communications Advisor</li> <li>• MEL Officer</li> <li>• Program Lead: Building Human Capacity (BHC)</li> <li>• Program Lead: Innovation and Commercialisation (I&amp;C)</li> <li>• Program Lead: Transformational Agricultural Systems</li> </ul> </td><td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Lead: Sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Enterprise (SATSIE)</li> <li>• Regional Soils Coordinator<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Digital Ag Consultant (I&amp;C)</li> <li>• Senior Research Officer (ESG)</li> <li>• Program Advisor SATSIE Program</li> <li>• Strategic Regional Planner</li> <li>• Drought Resilience Coordinator (x6<sup>2</sup>)</li> <li>• Adoption Officer (x3<sup>3</sup>)</li> </ul> </td></tr> </table> <p><sup>1</sup> core hub funding and in-kind <sup>2</sup> Funded through NHT Building Landcare Community Capacity program, <sup>3</sup> 2 funded using core hub funding and 1 funded using in-kind Extension and Adoption Grant (TekFarm)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director</li> <li>• Knowledge Broker</li> <li>• Program Manager</li> <li>• Communications Advisor</li> <li>• MEL Officer</li> <li>• Program Lead: Building Human Capacity (BHC)</li> <li>• Program Lead: Innovation and Commercialisation (I&amp;C)</li> <li>• Program Lead: Transformational Agricultural Systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Lead: Sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Enterprise (SATSIE)</li> <li>• Regional Soils Coordinator<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Digital Ag Consultant (I&amp;C)</li> <li>• Senior Research Officer (ESG)</li> <li>• Program Advisor SATSIE Program</li> <li>• Strategic Regional Planner</li> <li>• Drought Resilience Coordinator (x6<sup>2</sup>)</li> <li>• Adoption Officer (x3<sup>3</sup>)</li> </ul>								
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director</li> <li>• Knowledge Broker</li> <li>• Program Manager</li> <li>• Communications Advisor</li> <li>• MEL Officer</li> <li>• Program Lead: Building Human Capacity (BHC)</li> <li>• Program Lead: Innovation and Commercialisation (I&amp;C)</li> <li>• Program Lead: Transformational Agricultural Systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Lead: Sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Enterprise (SATSIE)</li> <li>• Regional Soils Coordinator<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Digital Ag Consultant (I&amp;C)</li> <li>• Senior Research Officer (ESG)</li> <li>• Program Advisor SATSIE Program</li> <li>• Strategic Regional Planner</li> <li>• Drought Resilience Coordinator (x6<sup>2</sup>)</li> <li>• Adoption Officer (x3<sup>3</sup>)</li> </ul>										
Governance	<p>A steering committee was established and is responsible for the strategic prioritisation and accountability for the hub's establishment and operations. The steering committee endorses allocation of funds to activities to ensure alignment to the hub's resilience outcomes, regional priorities, vision and mission.</p> <p>The eight members of the steering committee include 3 NRM representatives, 3 JCU representatives, 1 departmental representative, the CEO of the Torres and Cape Indigenous Councils Alliance, as well as an independent chair. The steering committee supports and informs a 'place-based' approach by influencing the strategic direction of the hub.</p>										
Core hub funding	<p>Hubs have been provided with core hub grant funding up to June 2026:</p> <table> <tr> <td>Core hub funding</td><td>\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)</td></tr> <tr> <td>Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025</td><td>\$1.25 million</td></tr> <tr> <td>Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026</td><td>\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)</td></tr> <tr> <td>FDF cross-hub projects</td><td>\$ 183,333 (October 2022)</td></tr> <tr> <td>FDF Adoption Officer funding</td><td>\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)</td></tr> </table>	Core hub funding	\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025	\$1.25 million	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026	\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)	FDF cross-hub projects	\$ 183,333 (October 2022)	FDF Adoption Officer funding	\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)
Core hub funding	\$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)										
Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025	\$1.25 million										
Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026	\$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)										
FDF cross-hub projects	\$ 183,333 (October 2022)										
FDF Adoption Officer funding	\$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)										
Additional funding for all hubs	<p><b>Hubs have been provided with additional Australian Government grant funding up to June 2028:</b></p> <table> <tr> <td>National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant</td><td>\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)</td></tr> </table>	National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant	\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)								
National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant	\$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)										

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes
	NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 1) \$375,000 (as of 30 June 2024)
	NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 2) \$743,486 (to June 2028)
Additional funding (advised by the hub)	FDF Extension and Adoption of Drought Resilience Farming Practices grant project Farmers2Founders TEKFarm-Accelerating and scaling adoption of drought resilience technologies.
Cross-hub funding	Received \$183,333 to participate in 1 cross-hub project: Managing Rangelands for Drought Resilience (Northern WA and NT Hub lead).
Subcontracts	As of December 2023, the hub had 33 subcontracts with service providers for cash and in-kind contributions. Of these, 9 involved the provision of cash in return for services
Priorities and projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The hub has 5 priority themes: drought and climate change adaption, land and soil management, innovation and technology, enhancing skills and human capacity, and enhancing sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resilience.</li> <li>The hub has 4 programs delivering their priority themes. These are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transformational Agricultural Systems – analyses climate data combined with local knowledge to integrate ESG (environmental, social, and governance considerations) in Australian agriculture.</li> <li>Sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Enterprise – supporting the facilitation of collective Traditional Custodian-led voice to address representation and participation in cultural natural resource management.</li> <li>Building Human Capacity – building human capacity and skills to deliver transformational change for profitable, socially and environmentally responsible and drought resilient agricultural systems and supply chains.</li> <li>Innovation and Commercialisation – delivering on-farm demonstrations, an innovation readiness assessment tool and supports ecosystem activation through supporting producers to engage with accelerator programs and relevant initiatives in the region.</li> </ul> </li> <li>The hub has delivered more than 130 activities which includes workshops, farm visits, school and university programs. There were 92 visitors across the farm trials and demonstrations.</li> </ul>

Note: Summary information has been compiled using the following sources: Tropical North Qld Hub Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning reports and PR1 to PR7 2021-24, Tropical North Qld Hub website, FDF Review request-Tropical North Qld Hub Staffing Survey response (Dec 2024), FDF Review request-Tropical North Qld Hub Additional Questions response (Dec 2024), Commonwealth and Tropical North Qld Hub Grant Agreement and associated operational plans, personal communications with Hub Directors and staff as part of online Review Team and Panel consultations, Have Your Say stakeholder submissions.

## Vic Hub

Category	Notes
Vision	To enhance drought resilience for all key agricultural sectors - grains, dairy, horticulture, and livestock across the state of Victoria. To break the nexus between the drought impacts in the regional farming sectors and the flow-on down-turns in regional communities.
Objective	To deliver collaborative research, development, extension, adoption and commercialisation (RDEA&C) activities aimed at helping primary producers and rural and regional communities to become more prepared for, and resilient to, future droughts.
Host organisation	University of Melbourne (UoM)
Hub name and website	Victoria Drought Resilience Adoption & Innovation Hub <a href="https://vicdroughthub.org.au/">https://vicdroughthub.org.au/</a>

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes
Structure	Hub members (university partners, node leads and Agriculture Victoria) have formed a consortium and are subject to partnership agreements with the UoM. The hub is decentralised in terms of both delivery of activities and operations, and financial distribution. Finances are allocated to each partner (except Agriculture Victoria), and each has their own co-designed operational plan, leading or contributing to specific activities of the hub. The regional nodes lead all consultation activities and co-design projects with local stakeholders.
Delivery model	The hub is delivered through a hub and spoke model with hub headquarters at the UoM (Dookie campus), and 5 node regions delivering targeted regional activities and outputs.
Members and partners	8 members were identified in the hub's initial grant agreement, including 3 universities, Agriculture Victoria and 4 industry groups. The initial grant agreement also identified an additional 49 associate organisations. As of June 2024, the hubs network also includes Mallee Regional Innovation Centre, totalling 10 members (including UoM).
Context	Regions in Victoria are characterised by different prominent industries and farming systems, each with their own landscapes and ecosystem profiles which translate into different drought risk profiles and opportunities. Key industries across Victoria include grains, dairy, horticulture and livestock.
Hub locations and geographical coverage	Hub headquarters is located 210km north of Melbourne at the UoM Dookie Campus. The hub covers Victoria through its 5 regional nodes. These are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North-East Regional Node, Riverine Plains Inc</li> <li>• North-West Regional Node, Birchip Cropping Group</li> <li>• South-West Regional Node, Southern Farming Systems</li> <li>• Gippsland Regional Node, Food &amp; Fibre, Gippsland</li> <li>• North-West Irrigated Horticulture Regional Node, Mallee Regional Innovation Centre</li> </ul> The hub utilises its website as a virtual shopfront providing access to resources, podcasts and information about their projects.
Staffing	37 hub staff members with a total of 17.425 FTE. Staff are funded through grant arrangements and in-kind contributions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hub Director<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Adoption Coordinator<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Admin Assistant<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Communication Officer<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Finance Administrator<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Regional Soil Coordinator<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Innovation Broker <sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Knowledge Broker (x5<sup>1</sup>)</li> <li>• SW Node Co-ordinators and project officers (x4<sup>2</sup>, x2<sup>7</sup>)</li> <li>• NE Node Co-ordinators and Project Officers (x2<sup>1</sup>)</li> <li>• SE Node Co-ordinators and Project Officers (x1<sup>1</sup>, x2<sup>2</sup>, x1<sup>7</sup>)</li> <li>• North West Irrigated Horticulture Node (x2<sup>1</sup>, x1<sup>5</sup>)</li> <li>• NW Node Co-ordinators and project officers (x4<sup>1</sup>)</li> <li>• Additional Hub services (University Partner) (x1<sup>1</sup>, x3<sup>2</sup>)</li> <li>• Industry partner services (staff x2<sup>6</sup>)</li> </ul> <p>1 Core hub funding, 2 Hub and in-kind funding, 3 NHT Building Landcare Community Capacity program, 4 Agrifutures funding, 5 UoM In-kind funding, 6 Industry in-kind funding, 7 In-kind (not identified)</p>
Governance	The Investor Oversight Committee (IOC) oversees the program of work of the hubs and provides strategic direction. The IOC meets quarterly and is made up of high-level representative of each partner and the department.  The Hub Operations Committee (HOC) is both an advisory and decision-making body that provides advice to the Hub Director on key operational matters, and also makes decisions on agreed activities, based on approval from the Hub Director. It is made up of operational leaders of each of the hub partners.  The hub nodes and partners each have their own boards and/or advisory committees that feed into decision-making through both the IOC and the HOC.  Following an internal review and in line with the original hub operation plan, the UoM established a Drought and Innovation Hub Research Advisory Committee to provide research and academic support to the Hub Director.
<b>Hubs have been provided with core hub funding up to June 2026:</b>	

## Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Review

Category	Notes
Core hub funding	Core hub funding \$8 million (as of 30 June 2024)
	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2025 \$1.25 million
	Core hub funding extension, July 2024 to June 2026 \$3.5 million (some milestone payments still to be made)
	FDF cross-hub projects \$855,842 (October 2022)
	FDF Adoption Officer funding \$1.125 million (May 2022 to April 2024)
Additional funding for all hubs	<b>Hubs have been provided with additional Australian Government grant funding up to June 2028:</b>
	National Agriculture Innovation Policy Agricultural Innovation Grant \$2.5 million (July 2022 to May 2023)
	NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 1) \$375,000 (as of 30 June 2024)
	NHT Regional Soil Coordinators (Round 2) \$743,486 (to June 2028)
Additional funding (advised by the hub)	The hub supports partner and non-partner organisations to access funding from other FDF programs. Hub partners have been awarded 2 grants from the Extension & Adoption of Drought Resilience Farming Practices Grants Program and 2 grants from the Long-term Trial of Drought Resilient Farming Practices Grants Program. The Extension and Adoption Grants and Long-Term Trial Grants include collaboration with the Tas Hub and SA Hub.
Cross-hub funding	The hub received a total of \$855,842 to lead on 1 project under the program, the Drought Resilience Practices in Mixed Farming Systems, and participation in 2 projects, Drought Management for the Health and Longevity of Perennial Horticulture Plants (SA Hub lead) and Modern Soil Moisture Monitoring to Improve Irrigation (SWWA Hub lead).
Subcontracts	As of December 2023, the hub had 8 subcontracts with service providers for cash and in-kind contributions. Of these, 7 involved the provision of cash in return for services.
Priorities and projects	<p>The hub has 6 priorities areas for activities: improve farm management, improve information provision and access, improve business management, improve advisory services, promote indigenous knowledge and culture and improve understanding the severity and impact of drought, especially in the face of climate projections.</p> <p>The hub has 8 core activities with hub members leading projects under the core activities. There are 21 active projects related to economic, environmental and social resilience. These projects include: Agtech tools, climate networks, seed sowing adoption programs, development and extension, soil improvement and water efficiency projects.</p>

Note: Summary information has been compiled using the following sources: Vic Hub Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning reports and PR1 to PR7 2021-24, Work logic Summary Review Report 2024, FDF Review request-Vic Hub Staffing Survey response (Dec 2024), Commonwealth and Vic Hub Grant Agreement and associated operational plans, personal communications with Hub Directors and staff as part of hub visits and online meetings.